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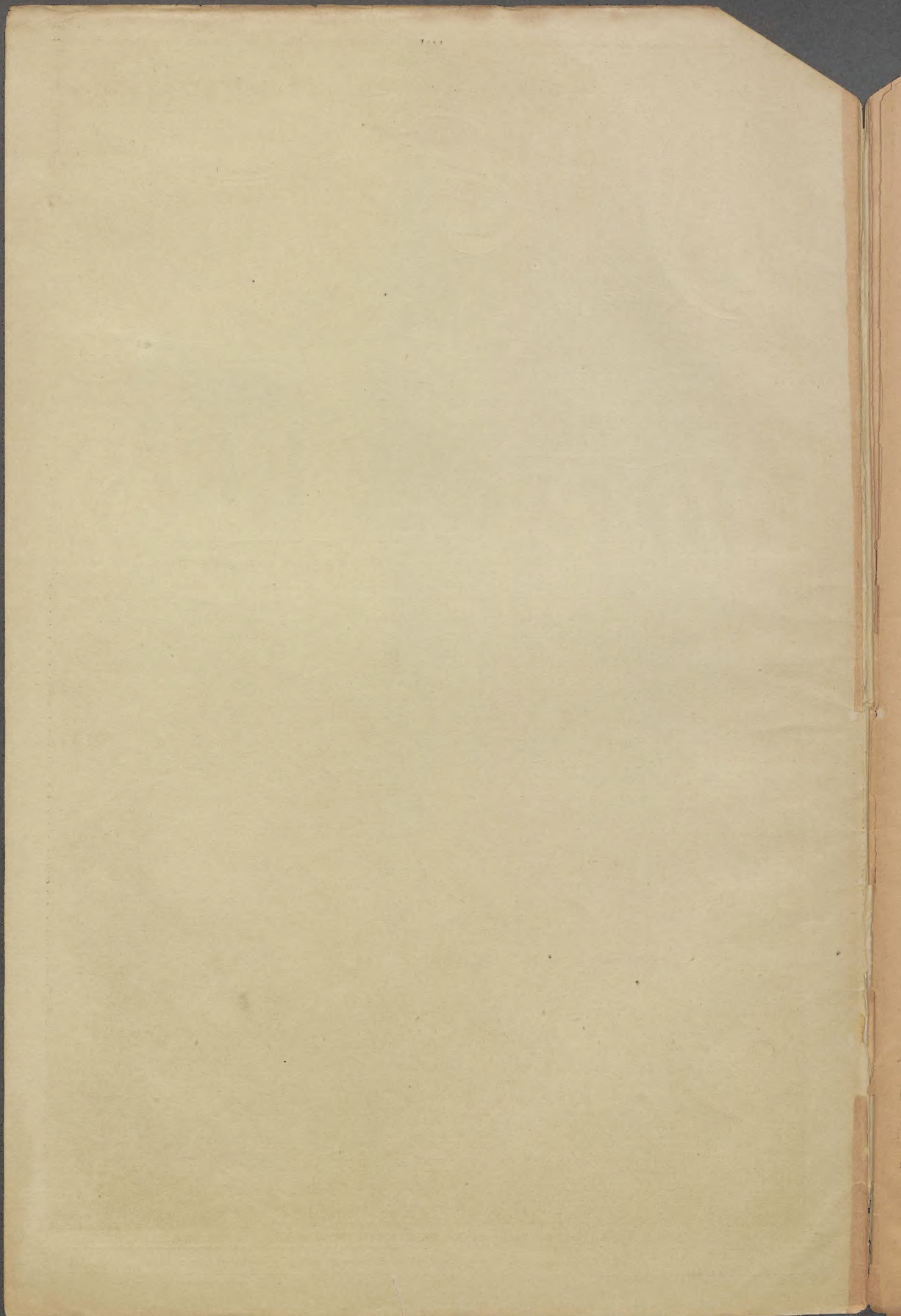
Vol. LXXVI.

By J. C. COWDRICK.

KID GLOVE KRIS, OF HARD PAN CAMP.



OUT SHOT THE PRISONER'S LEFT, AND MR. PETER GRIMES GOT IT SQUARELY IN THE NECK.



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KID GLOVE KRIS, OF HARD PAN CAMP.



OUT SHOT THE PRISONER'S LEFT, AND MR. PETER GRIMES GOT IT SQUARELY IN THE NECK.

Kid-Glove Kris, the Sport;

OR,

Detective Dave's Full Flush.

A Romance of the Pledged Pard of
Hard-Pan Camp.

BY J. C. COWDRICK.

CHAPTER I.

PRISONER AND CHAMPION.

It was the daily stage between Rainbow and Hard Pan.

Rainbow was a railroad town, while Hard Pan was a mining camp some sixty miles distant.

The relay station between these two points was a little settlement known as White Horse, about equidistant from both places. It was a place of not more than a dozen shanties, and depended on the stage line for its existence.

When the stage came whirling into White Horse on this occasion, it was seen at once that an excitement of some kind prevailed. Instead of lounging lazily in front of the one salon of the place, or hanging around the doors of the stable where the relay horses were kept, the whole population was congregated en masse in the open.

What did it mean?

The stage drawing nearer and coming to a stop, the driver was enabled to take in the situation.

In the midst of the group were two men holding a third—clearly their prisoner. The driver, knowing them all, immediately shared their excitement, in a measure, and called out:

"Hullo! Have ye got him at last, boys?"

"Yes, we have got him, Uncle Josh, you can just bet your boots!" was the response.

"Wull," urged the driver, further, "I am inclined to think ye have got the wrong man, after all."

"Why, how is that?"

"Et 'pears ter me that if Kid-Glove Kris had done ther deed, and had once got away clear, ye would never see him around these hyer parts again. Does et stand to reason?"

"Right, old man," spoke up the prisoner; "just what I have been trying to impress upon their minds, but they won't have it. I came here to take the stage to Hard Pan, and the first thing I knew they jumped me fer the murder of Thomas Kenton."

Those within the stage were now getting out, and before responding to the prisoner's remark the driver turned to his passengers.

"That's right," he spoke, "tumble out and stretch your legs—I mean yer bodies," at sight of a bright-faced young woman who at that moment appeared. "We stop hyer ten minutes."

And then to the prisoner:

"Thar is logic, in a solid cubic chunk," with a shake of the head. "I tell ye, boys, et is my belief that Kid-Glove Kris is innocent, after all."

"Then why don't he tell whar he was that night?" was demanded. "Whar has he been ever since? Et has a mighty s'picious look, Uncle Josh, as you will have to admit. He is as close as a clam on them p'int's."

The young woman mentioned had just placed one dainty foot on the step, in the order of getting out of the stage, when the prisoner made known that he had been arrested for the murder of Thomas Kenton, and she stopped short, her eyes for the moment fastened on his face.

She paled, then flushed, then paled again, and getting on out, took a position a little in the background.

She was a good-looking little body, clad in black.

"Why don't yer tell, Kris?" the driver demanded. "Ef ye kin clear yerself, et is yer duty to do et."

"Some things cannot be explained just now, Uncle Josh," the prisoner rejoined; "but this I will say, and have said—that I am wholly innocent of the crime."

"Wull, I hope ye will have a fair chance to prove et, that's all," remarked one of his captors. "Ther people of Hard Pan are at fever heat about ther matter, though, and they may take et into their heads to lynch ye on sight, ef you are as stubborn thar."

"I'll have to be lynched, then, I suppose," was the matter-of-fact rejoinder.

The prisoner was a large, finely formed, handsome man, under thirty years of age. He was roughly clad, in top boots, coarse and serviceable trousers, a short corduroy jacket and slouch hat. But he was clean-shaved, and his handsome mustache had a graceful curl.

"Wull, come, git out them thar critters!" called out the stage driver, arousing to the business of the moment. "We can't stand hyer all day! I will be back in jist one minute and a half, and I want ther ribbons ready fer my hands."

He had thrown the lines down on either side, and climbed from his seat, and now strode away in the direction of the one lone saloon of the settlement to "wet his whistle."

"What about et, now, Kid-Glove Kris?" asked one of the captors of the prisoner.

"About what?" the prisoner inquired.

"Will you git in and ride peaceable, or must we bind ye? Thar is a big reward on yer head, and we are bound to have et one way or another."

"You need not take the trouble to bind me," was the careless reply. "I was going to Hard Pan anyhow, and by this stage, so you will not be taking me out of my way."

"All right; we'll take ye at yer word; but, at the same time, don't ye ferget that we have each of us got a hand on a gun, and at ther first sign of tricks we'll be 'bliged ter let ye have et. Pard, you git in first, then Kid-Glove Kris, and I'll foller after."

In this order they got into the stage, the sport acting as indifferently as if the matter had little concern for him.

The young woman, meantime, was sauntering in the direction of the saloon.

Uncle Josh soon appeared, wiping his mouth.

"Hurry up thar, consarn ye all!" he bawled. "Git them thar critters buckled in! We can't stand hyer all day—Yer parding, miss; did you speak ter me?"

The young woman had accosted him.

"Yes; I wanted to ask you if I might ride with you on top the rest of the journey to Hard Pan?"

"Ride outside! Ain't ye afeerd?"

"Why, no; why should I be afraid? There are now so many men inside, only one vacant place—Please do not refuse."

"Don't see how any man could refuse ye anything ye might ask, miss, that's honest. Yas, you kin ride on ther box with me, of course, but ye must be keerful."

"Trust me for that, sir."

"Come along, then, and I'll boost ye up."

She followed him to the stage and was assisted up to the box, and by that time the last trace had been hooked and the lines were put in the driver's hands.

"That is ther way I like ter travel, close connections," said the old man. "Ye have done well, boys. I don't keep anybody waitin' fer me, and I don't like to wait fer anybody. Wull, so-long, feller galoots!" climbing to his place. "I opine I'll see ye all termorrer."

With that he drew up the lines, flung out his long whip and caused it to crack like a pistol, and with a loud "gee-up!" the stage went on its way.

He had six horses, but handled them as easily as any ordinary man might have handled two.

For a little while the driver and his fair companion were silent.

She seemed to be in a meditative mood; but, at length she asked:

"Have you any objection to talking a little, Mr. Josh?"

"Ha! ha!" the old fellow burst out laughing, to her evident surprise. "No, I ain't ther least 'bjection to talkin', miss, but I do 'bject to bein' called Mr. Josh. Call me Uncle Josh, ef ye want to, but don't put on no trimmin's, if ye please."

It was now her turn to laugh, and she did, with a merry ripple, which she checked rather abruptly.

"I merely wanted to inquire something about the murder for which the man inside has been arrested, and of which he declares he is innocent. You seemed to know him, and spoke as if you knew all about the matter."

"You are right in both cases, miss. I know Kid-Glove Kris well enough, and, as fer ther murder, everybody knows about that. While as fer talkin', I am one of ther consarnedest talkers ye ever heard tell of, once ye git me started. I was only holdin' my tongue out of per-liteness, but I don't reckon I could 'a' held et much longer, ef you hadn't spoke."

The young woman smiled sadly, but this time did not laugh.

"I will give you the chance to exercise your conversational powers, then, Uncle Josh," she said, "for I am curious to know all about the matter. Do you know, I am inclined to think as you do—that they have got hold of the wrong man. This man does not look like a murderer."

"And I don't believe he did do et, either, in spite of all 'pearances," the old man stoutly declared. "But, all the same, there are some ugly facts standin' in ther way that he will have to explain."

"Then why does he not do it?"

"That is ther question, miss, why don't he? Them that's got him think it is 'cause he can't."

"I am more inclined to believe it is because he won't. You know he told you there were some things he could not explain just now. Oh, no, I cannot think him guilty!"

"Wull, I am glad ye don't, gal. Lord knows he'll need all ther friends he kin muster when they git him to Hard Pan, for Thomas Kenton was a well-liked man there, and there's a plenty as believes that Kid-Glove Kris is the man who done for him. Maybe they'll lynch him."

"Oh! we must not allow them to do that, Mr.—I mean Uncle Josh. He must have a fair trial, no matter what the appearances are—I shall insist upon that—yes, I shall insist upon it. You do not know who I am, so I will tell you. My name is Myra Kenton, and Thomas Kenton was my father. Now, don't you think they will listen to me, Uncle Josh?"

CHAPTER II.

THE STORY OF A CRIME.

The grizzled old stage-driver looked at his companion with renewed interest and something of surprise.

"So, you aire Thomas Kenton's darter, aire you?" he said reflectively, and more as if speaking to himself. "Wull, now, I thought there was somethin' in your face that was familiar."

"But, answer my question, please," the young lady urged. "Do you believe they will listen to me? I cannot believe that the prisoner inside is my father's murderer, and it would be terrible if they were to hang the wrong man. Do you think they will respect my request?"

"Wull, now, gal, to be honest with ye, mebbly they will and mebbly they won't. Ef they aire dead sure they are right, they may take et into their heads that it will be doin' ye more of a favor to hang ther feller right up quick, ter show ye that they held yer dad in high respect. On t'other hand, mebbly you and the widdy together—"

"The widow?" in surprise. "What do you mean? What widow?"

"Why, her that was yer father's wife, on course; who else would—"

"My father's wife? Why, he was not married. Surely, there must be a great mistake somewhere, Uncle Josh."

"No mistake about that, anyhow, miss," the old man declared decisively. "He was married about a year ago, publicly, thar at Hard Pan, and ther widdy is a sure-enough fact, I kin assure ye."

The young woman seemed bewildered.

"This is news to me," she said. "Father never mentioned it to me in any of his letters. What is she like, Uncle Josh? Anywhere near my poor father's age?"

"Bless ye, no. She is young and handsome—not a day over thirty at the very most—younger if anything, and with the blackest hair and eyes ye ever seen in all yer days. She is fascinatin', I should say, if that is the word I want ter apply."

"And papa never told me."

The young woman fell to musing, and for a few moments neither spoke.

"But, the murder," she said presently. "You were going to tell me all about that. Pray do so now. I will try not to interrupt you."

"Et don't matter 'bout the interruptin', miss, but I take et that you know about et already, seein' that et didn't cut ye up when ye heard mention of it, and again seein' that ye are in black."

"Yes, I knew the sad fact, but the particulars—I would like to know all you can tell me about it."

"And that ain't much, miss. He was found dead on the floor of his office one mornin', with a bullet in his heart. No robbery had been done, nothin' was out of order, and et was a great mystery. 'Et was known that he had had a quarrel with Kid-Glove Kris—the feller inside hyer—and as Kris was missin' that mornin' et was set down at once that he was the man that had done the job. A big reward was posted fer him, men set out in every direction to find him, but he wasn't to be found, and so they sot et down fer a fact that he must be the party."

"You say that he and my father had a quarrel?"

"Yes, so they had."

"Do you know what that quarrel was about?"

"Wull, now, et's ruther a delicate matter ter mention," averred the old driver, looking straight ahead and tickling the ears of one of his horses with the tip of the whip.

"No matter; tell me all you know," the young woman insisted.

She was pale, but determined.

"Well, they do say that the sport was a little too familiar with yer father's wife to please the old gent, and that et kem of that. But folks will talk, ye know. As fer me, I don't know nothin' about et. I'm only tellin' what I have heard."

The young woman bit her lips, and her eyes flashed.

"What do you know about the prisoner?" she next inquired. "What is his reputation?"

"Wull, he is gen'ly 'counted white by them that know him best. They say he plays a square game, and he has never been known to cheat in his life. He had a good name."

"Am I to understand that he is a gambler?"

"Wull, he is a sport—yes."

"I would not have thought it—he does not look it. But what am I saying?"

"Ye are sayin' about what you and me seem ter think—that he ain't the right man," returned Josh, not catching her meaning. "I don't believe that he killed your father, miss."

"I hope he did not."

"No; Kid-Glove Kris ain't that kind, my opine."

"Ah! that reminds me of something I wanted to ask you—why do they call him by such a name as Kid-Glove Kris?"

"Why, fer the reason that he won't tetch the pasteboards without he has kid gloves on, no way, shape, ner fashion."

"Pasteboards?"

"Yas—kyards."

"Oh! I understand."

"That is the reason. Don't know why he is so p'tic'lar, but he is, and that is what guv him his odd name. I have watched him by the hour, playin', and him a-flippin' ther wicked pasties as dainty as ary woman, in his spotless kids all the time."

"No matter; if he is not guilty of the murder of my father, he must be saved from the lynchers—if you really think there is danger; and he must be given a fair trial. Did I understand you to say there are some who believe him innocent?"

"Yes, some."

"Who are they?"

"Wull, ther widdy, as I said—"

"Yes, I have not forgotten her. Tell me of others."

"Wull, thar is Nate Hawkins, that used ter be mayor of Hard Pan; he is on his side."

"And who is mayor now?" the young woman inquired.

"One Peter Grimes."

"How does he stand? Does he believe that this man—"

"Miss, he is pizen against Kid-Glove Kris. Ef et wasn't that he has ter make a showin' of law and order, I wouldn't be s'prised ter see him at ther head of ther lynchers."

"It is too bad that the other man, Mr. Hawkins, is not still in office, then. But, justice shall be done, Uncle Josh! No one can be more eager than I to see the guilty wretch brought to answer for his crime, but there must be no mistake made."

"I admire ye fer that stand, miss, and I hope that we won't see no trouble when we git thar."

"Oh! what a frightful place that is just ahead there!"

"Et will try yer narve, miss, but don't git skart; thar ain't no danger ter speak of. Sot right still, and we'll go around thar as stiddy as we kem through that canyon a ways back."

Nevertheless, the young woman grew pale, and she took a firm grip upon the iron side-rail of the seat with one hand and upon the driver's arm with the other.

And no wonder. It was a place calculated to daunt a stouter heart than hers.

The stage was now in the rugged mountains, where there was nothing but bare, barren rock on every hand, following the course of a divide.

It had come suddenly to a place where the trail seemed to come to an abrupt end. On one hand was a high wall, reaching up and up, and on the other a sheer descent, while ahead was nothing but the sky.

The trail ran out upon a ledge of rock that was seemingly no wider than the stage itself, and curved away to the left in a manner that gave it the appearance we have described. More than once had the nerves of a "tenderfoot" been put to the test here, mounted on the box as was this young woman.

"What if something were to break!" the girl gasped.

"Nothin' is likely ter break," assured the driver, carelessly. "Keep yer narve, gal."

"Or what if the horses were to take fright— Oh! Uncle Josh! do take care! I believe I will shut my eyes until we have passed the dreadful place. It is too frightful!"

The driver chuckled to himself.

They were just coming out upon the narrow ledge at the moment, and a pool of still, black water was seen some fifty feet below them, on the side the young woman was on.

"Thar ain't no danger, I tell ye," the driver tried to convince. "No hosses with sense aire goin' to take fright in sech a place as this; they think too much of their necks fer that, miss. Why, I have come around hyer on a dead lope, fore now— Thunderation! Whoa!"

Something had happened; but what?

The driver and his companion had felt a slight rocking of the stage, and immediately the click of one of the doors was heard.

Simultaneously with the click came the loud voice of the passengers, and, even before the driver could bring his six horses to a stop, the spiteful barking of revolvers awoke the canyon echoes.

The young woman, looking around before the driver could do so, beheld a sight that almost chilled her blood for the instant. A man had leaped from the stage! She saw him going down, down, toward the black water; he struck it with a loud splash and disappeared, while the bullets went pinging into the water close around the exact spot!

CHAPTER III.

DRIVER AND PASSENGER.

To say simply that excitement prevailed would be to express it far too mildly.

Excitement ran riot for a few moments. The two captors, thus cheated of their prize money, leaped from the stage with fierce execrations, but they took care not to follow their prisoner's daring example.

Holding to the wheels, they leaned over and gazed down into the black pool, their guns ready for further execution upon the slightest suggestion of the reappearance of their prisoner; but they looked in vain. The water had closed over the spot where the sport had disappeared, and he was seen no more.

"Thunderation!" cried Uncle Josh. "Ye don't mean ter say that yer man jumped down ther cliff!"

"Yes, yes! he did! he! did!" cried Myra Kenton, wildly excited. "And, oh; they have killed him; I know they have killed him!"

"You kin bet your sweet life that we have killed him, cuss him!" one of the captors grimly asserted. "He'd orter 'a' knowed better 'n to 'a' tried sech a thing."

"That's where you are right," assented the other. "We have ballasted him with lead in sech a fashion that he won't never rise again, you bet! He is at ther bottom of Devil's Inkhorn by this time. Et was impossible to miss him at sech a close range."

"Of course et was," the other coincided. "We'll claim that reward all ther same, fer hyer is proof a-plenty that we guv him his dinner before he went out of sight."

"Sartain sure," from the other. "That is the last of Kid-Glove Kris, fur as this world is concerned."

"I do not believe you touched him," spoke up the girl on the box.

"What! Yer don't? Why not?"

"Because I was looking straight at him, and I saw your bullets strike the water."

"Impossible, young woman, impossible! We are shots, me and my pard, and I tell ye we couldn't 'a' missed him, no-how. Oh, no; he got his dose hard enough!"

"And I declare that you did miss him, I care not how good shots you are," was the spirited rejoinder. "The stage was moving sufficiently to have disturbed your aim, and you fired with such haste you could not have been certain of your aim."

"Wull, if we missed him, whur is he?" one demanded.

"Alas! I do not know, but I feel sure that you did not hit him with a bullet. At any rate, I hope you did not."

"Yer hope that we didn't, and him a murderer? What are ye talkin' about, anyhow?"

"I do not believe he was the murderer, sir. He did not look like a bad man, I am sure."

"Jist what I am inclined ter think myself," put in Uncle Josh. "Thar was no murder in Kid-Glove Kris, I feel sure of et. But, of course, I don't p'tend to explain sarcumstances."

"No, I guess you don't. If he was innocent, why did he run the risk of his life by makin' sech a leap as this hyer?"

"I give et up, 'less et was 'cause he knowed he wouldn't git no show at Hard Pan."

"Why wouldn't he git a show thar, I'd like ter know?"

"Wull, you know what the feelin' is thar, and how dead bitter ther mayor is ag'inst him."

"No matter; he won't put 'em to any trouble now, that is sartain. I am sorry fer him, but we had ter let drive at him when he took things in his own hands like that."

The two chagrined captors took another long look down into the dismal hole.

The water of the Devil's Inkhorn was almost placid again, and there was not the slightest sign of the man who had taken the desperate plunge.

"No use," said one, shaking his head.

"He got his quietus, and he is at the bottom. We might jest as well go on, Uncle Josh. But, miss, see hyer: At first you hollered out that we had killed him."

"Yes, I know I did, in my excitement."

"And ye thort we had, too. What made ye change yer mind so suddent, ef I might ask?"

"Why, it came to me right away that I had seen the bullets strike the water, the same as I explained to you, and that being the case, they did not harm him, of course."

"A wonder ye wouldn't 'a' thought of that sooner. Who aire you, anyhow, that ye stick up fer him so?"

"I am Thomas Kenton's daughter, sir."

"Oh! ther dev— Yer pardon, miss; we hadn't no idee of that. We beg yer pardon."

"That is all right, gentlemen," said the girl. "The reason I defend the man is the reason I have stated—that he does not look like a murderer, and I cannot believe that he was one."

"Wull, we don't p'tend ter know, of course. Thar was a reward on his head, and we wur after that, that was all. Et was fer somebody else to say whether he was guilty or not. Reckon we might as well git on, Uncle Josh; et looks as if et's the last of Kid-Glove Kris."

"Yes, et looks so. Git aboard."

The two men got in, and the stage went on its way.

From her position on top, being on the side nearest the dark pool, the young woman looked back as long as the water could be seen.

There was no further sign of the man who had made the desperate leap, and as soon as the pool could no longer be seen the girl turned with a sigh and took in the new vista ahead.

"What do you think about it, Uncle Josh?" she presently asked.

"About what, miss?"

"Do you think they killed him? I am sure the bullets struck the water, for I saw the splashes plainly."

"Did ye count jist how many shots wur fired? Did ye take note jist how many bullets ye seen plunk ther water? Ef ye did, then we kin git at it in some kind of shape."

"No, I could not tell—"

"Wull, then, ther chances are that he got one of ther pills, and went to ther bottom. Them two fellers ain't no slouch shots, as they said."

"I suppose it must be so. I presume, now, they will make no further effort to find the murderer of my father, if they are convinced that this man was the one who did the deed."

"Mebby not, most of 'em."

"And that was chiefly what brought me here—to find his slayer and bring him to justice!"

"You? Ther deuce ye say?"

"Yes, I: I have taken a resolve that my father's death shall be revenged, for I loved my parent dearly. But to think that he has left a wife— I wonder no mention of that was made to me."

"Et is queer, no mistake. Who was et sent you the word?"

"A man named Gilbert Dougherty. Do you know who he is, or anything about him?"

"Oh, yes, I know him, miss. He is a lawyer thar at Hard Pan, and one of ther greatest shysters that ever stood in a pair of boots, my way of thinkin' about him."

"Indeed! His letters rather impressed me otherwise."

"Yas, and his slick tongue will impress ye more, when ye meet him, if ye don't look out."

"Do you mean to hint that he is not honest, Uncle Josh? You see, I am a stranger here, and any information you can give me will be appreciated. Tell me what you know."

"I don't know a whole lot about ther gentleman, miss, but my straight opinion of him is that he ain't as square as a die, not quite. He has a snaky look about the eyes that I don't like. But, then, as I said, I don't know a whole lot about him."

"Was he my father's lawyer?"

"I guess he is the only one at Hard Pan."

"Well, I shall meet him soon, and then I can form my own estimate of the man."

"Does he know you are comin'?"

"Yes."

"Then he will be on hand to meet ye, and ye can't mistake him. He is allus in black, and he looks more like a undertaker than he does like a lawyer. He wears his face shaved smooth."

"Is he friendly with my—with Mrs. Kenton?"

"As ter that, I can't say."

"Well, it does not matter. I shall meet them all in a little while now, and I will know."

"And I hope that you will be able to do ther business ye say has brung ye hyer," the driver declared. "I hope ye kin prove that et wasn't Kid-Glove Kris that done et."

"That reminds me— Do you drive the stage every day?"

"I sartain do, miss."

"Well, have you had a gentleman passenger for Hard Pan within a few days?"

"Wull, now, that ain't easy ter say. Ef you kin—"

"Of course, it is not easy, and as I have never seen the man it is impossible for me to describe him. Never mind, Uncle Josh; it does not matter. We will talk about other things, to while away the time. But, heavens! see there in the road!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE ARRIVAL AT HARD PAN.

"Whoap!"

Sharp the signal, and the stage driver applied the brake and brought his six horses up all standing.

And none too soon, for the leaders were within a yard or two of a man who was lying face downward in the middle of the road, his head somewhat bent to one side and his arms outstretched.

This was what Myra Kenton had seen—what had caused her to utter the words with which the preceding chapter closed.

"He must be dead!" she added immediately.

"Deader'n a hammer, I should say," the driver agreed. "A leetle more and he'd a' been deader still."

"What's the matter now?" called a voice from one of the windows. "What is the 'citement this time, Uncle Josh?"

"Git out hyer, you deputy sheriff fellers, and see who that man is in ther 'road ahead," was the response. "I opine he's dead."

"A dead man!"

So exclaiming, men came tumbling out of the stage on both sides, and they hastened along to the head of the team, where the man was lying.

The driver and his companions saw them turn the man over and knew without asking that he was dead. The body

was nearly stiff, and there was a dark stain on the breast.

"Who is it?" the driver shouted inquiringly.

"Give it up," was the answer. "He is a stranger hyerabouts, we should say."

"Go for his pockets, then and see what he has got aboard; that is the only way to find out, I opine," Uncle Josh directed.

This was done and one of the men took some letters from the dead man's inside coat pocket, proceeding to examine them forthwith, the others eagerly waiting.

"Wull, what d'ye find?" the driver called out impatiently.

"Why, et 'pears his name was David Coleman, and that he hailed from Denver—"

There was a sudden scream, uttered by the young woman on the box with the driver, and for a moment she covered her face with her hands.

"You know him, then?" the driver asked.

"Yes, yes; it is the man I was going to inquire about only a little while ago, sir."

"Ther mischief et is! Who and what was he, then?"

"He was a detective, sir, whom I engaged to come here and assist me in ferretting out the mystery of my father's murder."

"Thunderation!"

That, it seemed, was a favorite expletive of Uncle Josh's.

"Who can have murdered him?" the young lady mused. "Surely, no one knew he was coming here, for I told no one."

"No, but mebbly he had—"

"No, no, for it was he who cautioned me against telling. He did not want a soul to know who he was or his business here. Poor man! little I thought I should find him so."

"Wull, git him aboard," the driver directed. "Et is a long time since I have carried a dead man."

The men picked up the body and bore it toward the stage.

"Whar will ye have et?" one asked.

"On ther rack behind," the driver directed. "Et will ride on top of the trunks, I opine."

"And give me his papers," the young woman requested.

They looked at her in surprise. They had not heard what she had been saying to the driver.

"Why should we give ther papers to you?" the man who held them demanded wonderingly. "We'll give 'em to Mayor Grimes when we git to Hard Pan."

"You will give 'em to ther lady, same as she says," spoke up Uncle Josh in a tone of determination. "This man is a friend of hers, one that she expected to meet when she got to Hard Pan."

"Oh! that bein' ther case—"

He handed the letters up to her promptly.

The dead man was put on the top of the trunks on the rack behind, the men got aboard, and the stage went on.

"Did ye know ther feller, miss?" the driver inquired.

"No; you know I told you I had never seen him, but there can be no doubt of his identity, for here are my own letters to him—David Coleman, Denver, Col."

"Et looks straight enough, that's ther fact. Wull, now ye have got a doubled knot to ontie?"

"Yes, yes, and I am almost bewildered."

"Wull, wull, ye will soon be at Hard Pan now, and mebbly you and ther widdy workin' together ye kin git to ther bottom of ther double mystery."

A cloud seemed to come over the face of the young woman, and she bent her head low over the papers she was examining. But little more was said, this sad event seeming to have thrown a gloom over the young woman's spirits and the driver respecting her reticence.

Day was drawing to a close when the stage rolled into Hard Pan.

Hard Pan was a place of some importance. It was a mining center, in the midst of a country rich in gold deposits.

It was, in fact, a young city, thoroughly up to date, having telephone connection with the outside world, electric lights, a trolley car on its main thoroughfare, and so forth.

A great shout was heard as the stage drew near; men came pouring out of the hotel, stores, and other places, and in a few moments the street was fairly black with people. Excitement seemed to prevail, and the young woman passenger looked at the driver inquiringly.

"What does it mean?" she voiced her curiosity.

"Why, they expect ter see ther prisoner," was the ready explanation.

"The prisoner? How could they know anything about it?"

"Why, by the telephone from White Horse, of course Hard Pan ain't behind ther times, you bet!"

No opportunity was given to say more, for by that time the stage entered the main street and the crowd opened a passage for it to approach the big hotel.

As the stage entered the opening the crowd closed in behind, and, with a great clamor, crowded upon it, sides and rear. Then, in a moment, was made the discovery of the dead man on the rack behind, and the wild clamor was tenfold increased.

"Whar is he?" cried the crowd ahead, "Give us a sight at him!"

"Who is ther dead man?" from the crowd behind. "What has been goin' on, anyhow, Uncle Josh?"

Other questions were asked and things said all in the space of a few moments, but nearly all to similar effect, as the stage drew to its stopping place, before the Cosmopolitan Hotel, a modern structure three stories high and containing over a hundred rooms. The piazza was lined with people, men and women together, noticeable among whom were a couple near the steps.

These were a man and woman, the first a stout, well-dressed individual with a full, black beard; the other tall, handsome, and clad in somber garments.

The woman was speaking energetically, her hand on the man's arm.

He was scowling.

Somehow, Myra Kenton's eyes singled these two out at once, and she rightly guessed that the woman was her father's widow.

While Myra was looking the man turned his face toward the woman and spoke, not more than a few words, and hurriedly descended the steps at the moment the stage stopped.

"Whoap!" sung out Uncle Josh, applying the brake and bringing his six horses to a standstill.

"Make room here!" ordered the black-whiskered man, authoritatively, as he pushed his way forward. "No violence to the prisoner, citizens."

"Don't give yerself any trouble, Mayor Grimes," called out the driver. "We ain't got no prisoner aboard this hyer trip."

"No prisoner!" the mayor exclaimed, and a hundred others with him, and he looked the surprise he felt.

"Nary!" assured Uncle Josh.

"No, but we had him hard and fast enough, though," here put in one of the deputy sheriffs, as the passengers made their appearance. "Ye have seen ther last of Kid-Glove Kris."

"The last of him—what do you mean?" from the Mayor.

"I mean that he's dead," asserted the man in a tone loud enough for all around to hear.

Myra Kenton noted that the tall, handsome woman in black turned deathly pale for an instant at that announcement.

"Dead?" the ejaculation escaped her.

"But, ther galoot behind?" the crowd was demanding. "Who is he? Whar did ye git him?"

So eager, so excited were they all, that they could not be satisfied half fast enough, and to them it seemed that the driver and all the rest were aggravatingly slow.

"Who is behind?" demanded the mayor.

"A dead man," they answered him.

"Kid-Glove Kris?"

"No, no, somebody else. Why in misery don't they tell us?"

"Thunderation!" yelled the driver. "Why don't ye give us half a show ter tell ye, then mebbly we would. Hyer, somebody help this lady down."

A tall man in deepest black, with face clean shaven, had been striving his hardest to get to the front, and, having at that moment succeeded, he lifted his hat to Myra, asking:

"You are Miss Myra Kenton? I am Gilbert Dougherty. Proud and delighted to welcome you safe to Hard Pan. Pray allow me," holding up his arms. "Ah! you are heavier than you looked to be. Room for the lady, please, gentlemen. This way, miss, and I will present you to—to Mrs. Kenton."

CHAPTER V.

CHAGRIN OF THE PEOPLE.

Gilbert Dougherty had introduced himself needlessly.

Myra Kenton had recognized him at sight by the description she had received from the stage driver.

She allowed him to lift her down from her high perch and to retain her hand as he conducted her through the throng in the direction of the piazza and up the steps to where the woman in black was standing.

"Mrs. Kenton," he said, bowing, "permit me to present your late husband's daughter, Miss Myra Kenton." And he bowed again as he ended, releasing Myra's hand and scraping backward a pace to allow the two ladies room in which to greet, he having played his little part.

There was a moment of silence while the two women looked at each other.

"I was not aware that my husband had a daughter," said Mrs. Kenton.

"Nor I that he had a second wife before this day," returned Myra.

"Strange that he never told me," said the widow.

"Yes, very strange, I agree with you."

They looked at each other again, searchingly. Then, as if suddenly recollecting that it was her duty to greet, the tall beauty extended her hand, saying:

"You will pardon me, I am sure. This is such a surprise that I was for the moment quite taken aback. Pray, let me make amends," drawing her nearer and kissing her. "Mr. Dougherty, why did you not tell me that Mr. Kenton had a daughter?"

"A thousand pardons, I beg," said the lawyer, bowing and scraping with greatest servility, "but how was I to know that you did not know it? Who would have supposed for a moment that it was not known to you? I am so surprised myself that I hardly know what to say. And that you, miss, did not know that your father had married—"

Words failed him, and he left it unfinished.

"No matter; we will talk of it later, dear," said the widow, still retaining Myra's hand. "No one else need know; you understand, Mr. Dougherty?"

"Perfectly, madam."

"You may leave us; we will consult with you later. I am eager to hear what those men are saying. You will pardon me, dear?" embracing Myra with one arm.

No one was taking any notice of them, but all attention was being given to the stage driver and his passengers, who were telling the events of the day about as known to the reader.

The crowd listened with bated breath. "And so, don't et stand to reason that he is dead?" one of the deputy sheriffs demanded.

"It will be more than a miracle if he isn't," agreed the mayor. "But, now, this other—this dead man whom you found a few miles out on the trail; who is he?"

"Ther young lady knowed him," volunteered the driver. "His name I ferget this minnit, but et was on letters in his pocket, and she said he was a detective she had engaged to come hyer and try to solve the mystery of her father's murder."

"Indeed!"

Myra Kenton felt her stepmother give a start and saw her face pale for an instant.

"Is this true?" the widow asked her quickly. "Did you recognize the man, then?"

"Yes, it is true; I knew him by the letters," answered the girl.

"Get the body down here and let's have a look at it," the mayor ordered. "Is it possible that we have got another mystery to deal with? We have had more than enough already."

Willing hands were taking the dead man down, even as the mayor gave the order, and the body was soon laid on the ground in plain view.

"A stranger to me," answered the mayor.

He looked around and, seeing Myra on the piazza, lifted his hat to her and asked:

"Do I understand that you know something about this man, Miss Kenton?" He had heard the lawyer mention her name, and the driver had repeated it since.

"Yes, sir," Myra answered. "His name was David Coleman, and he was a detective whom I engaged to come here and work out the mystery of my father's death and bring his murderer to justice."

"Ha! what d'ye think now, Peter Grimes?" a man demanded.

He was a man roughly clad and wore a full beard something like the mayor's own.

"What do I think about what, Nate Hawkins?" the mayor snarled as if displeased to have the man address him so familiarly. "What do I think about what?"

"Why, about Kid-Glove Kris, of course. Ain't this proof that he was innocent of that crime?"

"I don't see it. How do you make it out?"

"Why, hyer was a detective comin' to look into that case. Some galoot found it out and put a bullet into him to cut short his career. Now, that couldn't 'a' been Kid-Glove Kris, fer he was at White Horse under arrest. Don't et stand to reason?"

"It is pretty good evidence that he did not kill this man, but that is all," retorted the mayor.

"All? Ain't et proof that he didn't kill Kenton?"

"I don't see how."

"Then I'll try to make ye see, ef I kin: The man that killed this chap must 'a' knowed he was coming hyer, and he laid fer him and done him up. Now, who would have cause ter do that, 'cept the man that had most to fear; namely, the murderer himself?"

"That is all very well, but could not Kid-Glove Kris have had a pard do the dirty job for him? In fact, it looks to me as if it may have been just such a scheme as that, and Kid-Glove Kris made his appearance at White Horse at just the right time to reap the benefit of the very point you have just raised. No, I am not convinced at all."

"Mebby ye wouldn't be convinced, if ther murderer was ter come and confess and give himself up."

"I have my opinion, you have yours, that is all."

"But, sir," spoke up Myra, "no one knew the man was coming here. He had expressly cautioned me against informing anybody."

"But, some one must 'a' found et out, it stands to reason," argued Mr. Hawkins.

"And who would be as likely to know it as Kid-Glove Kris?" questioned the mayor. "He was a wide-awake sport, and knew which way the wind was blowing every day in the week."

"Wull, thar ain't no use our wranglin' over et," assumed the ex-mayor. "Hyer is ther detective, dead, and somebody killed him, that is sartain. You have now got another case on your hands, Pete, and I hope that ye will be able to clear one of 'em up, anyhow."

The mayor turned his back upon him.

"Pick the poor devil up, boys, and carry him away," he directed. "See that a coffin is made for him, and in the morning we will inquire into his death formally."

He waved his hand and turned toward the piazza.

The mail had been handed out, the baggage taken down from the rack, and now Uncle Josh drove in the direction of the stables, a portion of the crowd following to hear still further details.

The remainder pressed around the two deputy sheriffs who had made the distinguished arrest at White Horse, to learn more of the particulars from them.

The mayor ascended the steps and spoke to Mrs. Kenton.

"You heard it all, of course," he observed.

"Yes, I heard."

"I would have done my best to save the prisoner from violence, as you desired, but, as you saw, there was no prisoner there. He took a daring risk, and has paid for it with his life."

"Then you think he is dead?"

"Why, not a doubt of it. The leap was almost enough, of itself, and add to that the bullets that were sent after him—Oh! he met his fate, beyond any question."

The woman was pale.

"How foolish of him!" she exclaimed.

"Why did he take such a risk, when—when—"

"When what, Mrs. Kenton?"

"Why, he had a possible chance of being acquitted, you know; and, unlike you, I cannot believe that he did the deed."

"I know that is the view you hold, Mrs. Kenton, but does not his very desperation show that he was guilty? An innocent man would have faced a trial in preference to taking such chances as that."

"Well, well, I do not know. I only wish that the matter might be cleared up and the guilty one punished—or, if it was Kid-Glove Kris, then I would like to have some definite proof of it. You see, he has my sympathy for the injustice my husband did him."

"And there was the motive—but, let us drop the painful matter. So, this is Thomas Kenton's daughter?"

"Yes; and, your pardon, permit me to introduce her."

This was gracefully done, the mayor acknowledging it suitably. The widow then led the young lady into the house.

The mayor's brow darkened as he walked away from the spot, and he went muttering to himself. There was more mystery forced under his official notice than he could cope with, possibly.

"She is determined to believe him innocent, in the face of everything," he told himself. "I am inclined to the belief that perhaps Tom Kenton had good reason for his break with Kid-Glove Kris. Well, I hope he is effectually out of the way, anyhow."

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT MAN WAS THIS?

Hard Pan was disappointed.

Her people had congregated with the

certain expectancy of seeing the Kid-Glove Sport brought into town a prisoner.

To be sure, the story of his daring leap from the stage down into the Devil's Inkhorn had in a measure gratified their morbid desire for a sensation, but they were disappointed nevertheless.

And that would have in no wise sufficed had it not been supplemented by the new enigma—the dead man whom the stage had brought in. The fact of his being said to have been a detective, lent additional interest to the mystery that surrounded his murder.

As said, day was about drawing to a close when the stage arrived.

In half an hour more the electric lights were turned on, and with glint and sparkle the town took on a new appearance and night was turned back again into day, to all intents and purposes.

The brighter the light the blacker the shadow, however, is a saying that is not to be gainsaid, so far as the electric light is concerned, and while Hard Pan was fairly ablaze with light along her main street and in her public resorts, there were corners here and there where deep darkness reigned.

Hard Pan, as we have said, was up to date in many respects, but her denizens, when they thronged the main street and the public resorts after nightfall, made a motley concourse. The man in broadcloth and the begrimed miner in coarse attire jostled elbows, and the skirts of the respectable woman brushed those of the camp adventuress. The professional "bad man," with his guns in their holsters flapping his thighs at every stride, and his belt full of bullets, made the humble, serious-faced "parson," on his way to the "Gospel Tent" up the gulch, give him the right of way.

Mrs. Marie Kenton and her late husband's daughter, Miss Myra, had just supped and returned to the former's suite of handsomely furnished rooms in the Cosmopolitan, and were looking from the windows upon the scene just briefly described, when they became aware of a more than usual stir and bustle.

At first it was only a man running, then another, and yet still another, who seemed to be giving some word of news as they ran, and in a few seconds men came pouring out of open doors and the street was soon black with human beings. It had all taken place so suddenly that, as yet, the two women mentioned had found no chance to make remarks.

"What can be the matter?" Myra suddenly questioned, turning to her handsome step-mother.

"I do not know, of course," was the placid response. "Some common shooting affray, maybe. You will get used to such things, if you are here long, my dear."

"It must be something of great moment," Myra rejoined. "Hear them all shout, and see how excited they appear to be. They are all looking up the street, too, the direction from which the news came—whatever it can be. Oh! I do wonder what is the matter?"

Even the widow now shared a little of the excitement, and looked eagerly up the street.

"We shall soon know, now," she observed. "The crowd is moving this way."

A dense crowd was moving down to the city centre—as the space before the Cosmopolitan Hotel on the one side and the Metropolitan Saloon on the other, was called.

Another moment, and those looking from the windows were enabled to make out the cause of the unusual commotion.

Two mounted men were coming, and between them, on foot, bareheaded and in his shirt sleeves, they had a prisoner. He was a large, finely formed, handsome man, as he was distinctly revealed under the glare of the electric lights, and at sight of him Myra gave a gasp and the widow uttered a slight scream.

"Kid-Glove Kris!" the latter exclaimed.

"Yes, it is he—the prisoner who leaped from the stage down into the water," said Myra.

Mrs. Kenton had thrown open the window by which she was standing as Myra was speaking, and Myra left the window she was at and joined her there, and both leaned out.

"Yes, you kin bet your life et is Kid-Glove Kris, even ef he does deny et!" one of the captors was just shouting. "Hyar he is, as large as life, and we are ready fer that reward. Whar is Mayor Grimes? Tell him to come out hyer and take a squint."

Everybody was shouting; a thousand things were said in a moment, as it seemed; the street was in an uproar.

Just then the mayor made his appearance out of the Metropolitan.

"What's all this about?" he demanded.

"Hyer's yer prisoner! Hyer's yer Kid-Glove Sport!"

"Thunderation! So et is, as I'm born!" cried Uncle Josh, the stage-driver.

"Where did you find him?" the mayor wished to know, pushing his way out into the street. "I never expected to see him again in this world."

"Why, we overtook him 'tween hyer and Devil's Pass, headin' this way, and as we knowed him on sight we jist nipped onto him and guv him a lift on his road."

"Are you an officer, sir?" the prisoner asked, when Mayor Grimes came to where he stood.

"Yes, as you well know," the answer.

"As I do not know. These men have made a mistake. I am not the person they take me to be; I never heard his name, even."

"Ha! ha! ha! I don't know what game you are up to, sport, but you can't hope to fool us by any such story as that. We know you too well, here at Hard Pan."

"I insist that there is a mistake, sir."

"Why, do you take us all for fools, confound you?"

"Don't his clothes show fer his dive into Devil's Inkhorn?" some one called attention.

At that remark the prisoner looked from one face to another, as if for the moment bewildered. There could be no doubting his identity.

"I wonder what he is attempting?" muttered Mrs. Kenton, speaking more to herself than to her companion. "He certainly is Kid-Glove Kris, and yet he is stoutly denying his identity."

"I am sure he is the man who leaped from the stage down into that dismal hole," declared Myra. "But, if his life is at stake here, as I was told it is, he naturally would deny that he is Kid-Glove Kris."

"Yes, but the absurdity of it, where everybody knows him."

"Why don't you say something?" urged the mayor. "Can you still pretend—"

"There is no pretend about it," interrupted the prisoner, with a showing of spirit. "I am not Kid-Glove Kris—never heard of such a man in my life. You can believe it or not."

"Then who the devil are you?" asked the mayor, with more force than elegance.

"I refuse to answer the question, at present."

"Well, if you are trying to play any insane doings, that will not serve you. You are Kid-Glove Kris; you were taken prisoner to-day at White Horse; on your way here you jumped from the stage into a hole known as Devil's Inkhorn, where you were left for dead. And here you are, your clothes hardly dry yet, and have the gall to deny that you are Kid-Glove Kris—ha! ha! ha!"

"Lynch ther liar!" some one shouted.

"Ef ye do ye wull lynch ther wrong man, 'pend on et," chimed in a new voice at that juncture.

Mayor Grimes wheeled about to find who had spoken, and discovered ex-Mayor Hawkins at his elbow.

"What do you know about it?" Grimes brusquely wanted to be informed.

"Mebby as much as you do," was the calm rejoinder.

"You mean to say that this man is not Kid-Glove Kris?"

"That is just what I do say."

"Then I say that you are either a fool or drunk—maybe both."

At that the crowd laughed, and the ex-mayor flushed with anger for a moment, but quickly recovered.

"All right; have it your own way," he said, passively. "Ther man that laughs last laughs ther best, I have heard tell. We'll see whether et will be you or me."

"Yes, we will see," grated the mayor.

"And you will not be the one to laugh, sir," the prisoner said to him. "I am glad to see there is one man in this crowd who is not blind."

"Blind be hanged!" growled the mayor. "He is the only one that is blind—the only one you have blinded. Men of Hard Pan," raising his voice, "who is this fellow anyhow?"

"Kid-Glove Kris!"

The answer was prompt and in full volume.

"How can that man be so terribly mistaken?" asked Myra Kenton of her companion.

"I don't see," was replied. "It certainly is Kid-Glove Kris, and I cannot understand why he should pretend that it is not he. It must be a ruse to save his life."

"To the jail with him!" the mayor had ordered while they were speaking. "He will have the night in which to change his mind and remember who he is, and by daylight maybe even you will be convinced, Nate Hawkins. To the jail with him, and—but, come on, Hawkins."

The prisoner was taken to the log lock-up, where the mayor and ex-mayor entered with him and the door was locked upon them, by the mayor's order.

The prisoner was in no amiable mood, as his face showed. The mayor ought to have seen it—maybe did, but he was imprudent. Almost his first words were to call the man a liar, when—

Out shot the prisoner's left, straight from the shoulder, and Mr. Peter Grimes got it squarely in the neck, immensely to the amusement of Hawkins.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DISPUTE AS TO IDENTITY.

The Hard Pan jail was a solid structure.

It was built of logs, extra large, but flattened so as to lie compact.

About fifteen feet in the square, the ceiling was about eight feet high, and there were six narrow, barred windows in the sides.

The furniture was meager enough, consisting only of a stool and a bench with a back to it, something like a settee, but only large enough to hold a couple of visitors. The stool, evidently, was for the prisoner.

On entering, the ex-mayor had immediately appropriated the stool to himself, and the mayor had been about to deposit his own portly personage on the settee when he uttered the incautious word that resulted in his being deposited in a place and manner unexpected.

The prisoner had crossed sullenly to a corner, had just turned around when the word fell from Grimes's lips, and the blow followed the word with lightning quickness.

Over backward went the mayor, and the settee was crashed to the floor under him as he went down.

"He! ha! haw!" laughed Hawkins, clapping his hands. "Didn't ye know et was loaded, mayor? Prisoner, I said that you wasn't Kid-Glove Kris, but blame me ef I ain't almost converted to ther belief that you aire him!"

"No man calls me a liar to my teeth without getting it back with interest, if I am free to give it back," the prisoner averred, with emphasis.

"That is like Kid-Glove Kris, fer all the world," asserted Hawkins.

"I tell you again that I am not he; let that suffice for once and all. I am not Kid-Glove Kris!"

"Don't misunderstand me," placated Hawkins, drawing back; "I ain't sayin' you aire; I am only sayin' that you aire mighty like him, fer that is about his manner of style."

This during the moment or two that Grimes lay floundering on the floor in the wreck of the settee.

He was now scrambling to his feet.

"No, but I say he is," he shouted, white with rage, as he jerked a gun from his hip-pocket; "and he has got to own it, or—"

"Hold on!" interposed Hawkins, jumping up and placing himself between them. "Don't let yer temper git ther best of yer hoss sense," he advised. "You don't want any hemp in your'n, I know."

"He had no business to strike me—"

"And you had no business ter tempt him, ef ye thought et was Kid-Glove Kris."

"Thank this man for saving your life," said the mayor, sullenly, as he shoved his gun back into his pocket. "I would have done it, in my first rage, sure as my name is Grimes!"

"Perhaps you will not call me a liar again," suggested the prisoner, with as much sullenness. "It was piled on a little thicker than I could stand, and that capped the climax. I tell you again, and for the last time, that I am not the man you have taken me for."

The mayor was rubbing his injured neck, for the blow had been no gentle one.

Only for his office—with Hawkins out of the way—and the prisoner would have been laid dead at his feet as soon as he could have drawn a gun.

"Then tell me who in the mischief you are," the mayor insisted, hardly able to control his passion.

"That I am not prepared to do."

"Not prepared? Why not?"

"If I explain that, I may as well tell all. I will simply say that I am not yet ready to make myself known."

"And you still insist that you are not Kid-Glove Kris?"

"For the last time—yes."

The mayor left off with fondling his injured neck long enough to give his head a vigorous scratch.

"Hawkins, do you still say he is not Kris Dursey?"

"You kin bet that I ain't sayin' he is, after what I have jist seen," was the evasive response.

"Well, sir, if you are not Kid-Glove Kris you are enough like him to be his twin brother, is all I have to say. I have my own opinion still in the matter, however."

"You are welcome to it."

"Will you answer some questions?"

"That will be according to what the questions are."

"Well, for one, how and when did you get your clothes wet? They are barely dry."

"I have been in the water."

"Where, when, and how?"

Hawkins, who knew the mayor well, could see that he was having all he could do to keep his temper down and his hand away from his gun.

The enemy of Kid-Glove Kris before, for some reason, he was even more bitter against him now—certainly believing that this man was he, and the wonder to Hawkins was that he managed to hold his temper as well as he did. The ex-mayor was ready for an outbreak any instant.

"Those are questions I cannot answer now," was the answer.

"Why in thunder can't you?" white

with passion. "Do you forget that I am mayor of this town?"

"I care not who or what you are, sir. When I am ready to make myself known, I will talk; not before. I have told you who I am not; let that answer for the present."

"It does not answer."

"It will have to."

"Do you know what is going to happen?"

"No."

"You will be tried to-morrow on the charge of having killed Thomas Kenton, that is what."

"Well, I think there will be some difficulty about proving it."

"You do, eh?"

"I am sure of it."

"You had a quarrel with him, you were missing on the morning he was found murdered, and this is the first that has been seen of you since—"

"Suppose you stop right where you are, mayor," the prisoner interrupted. "You are bound to insist that I am Kid-Glove Kris, as you call him. For the very last time—I am not he."

"Well, taking your word for it that you are not, what will be the difference? You will be charged, as I have said, and ninety-nine out of every hundred men here in Hard Pan will hold that you are guilty of the crime and that you are Kid-Glove Kris."

"Then will be the time for me to prove that I am not either."

"Can you do it?"

"Wait and see."

"Pah!" and the irate mayor took a turn up and down the room.

"What did I say, first sight, mayor?" demanded Nate Hawkins. "Didn't I say it wasn't Kid-Glove Kris? Et is hard to believe, I allow, after the letter he giv you, but—"

"He will suffer for that, curse him," was the growl.

"My humble opine is that you had better swoller it and call the 'count square. You called him a liar, and you got the result; that makes et even. But, say, Mister Man, what aire we goin' to call ye, ef you ain't Kid-Glove Kris, as I agree ye ain't?"

"We'll call him Kid-Glove Kris, that is what we'll call him, till he proves himself somebody else," snarled Grimes.

"Call me anything you please," returned the prisoner, ignoring the mayor and answering Hawkins.

"Wull, I will call ye Sport Number Two, fer now."

"Good enough."

"Come," said the mayor, striding to the door. "Enough of this business for one dose."

"But he will want somethin' ter eat," suggested Hawkins.

"He will get it when he gets his breakfast, not before—a lesson for the blow he struck me. Do you hear, prisoner?"

"I hear, sir."

"And you will hear more to-morrow, when you are brought to a hearing, be sure of that. We have an inquest to attend to first, and then the people will be eager enough to attend to you."

"An inquest, you say? Has some further mischief been done here?"

"Answer him if you want to, Hawkins," snarled the mayor. "I am in no mood for talking. Cut it short, though."

He opened the door and stepped out.

"Yes," explained the ex-mayor; "another murder has been done, and I opine thar's some hyer would like to lay that to the door of Kid-Glove Kris, too, ef they could, but they can't."

"Who has been killed now? How do you clear your friend?"

"Why, Kris was a prisoner at White Horse about ther time ther job must 'a' been done; that's how et clears him, ef proof was wanted, which thar wouldn't be, ef et was left to me. As ter who has been killed, he was a detective feller that had come from Denver to clear up t'other mystery."

If Hawkins had been a closer observer,

he would have noted that the prisoner gave an inward start.

"There is more mystery, then, I should say," he remarked. "Sorry you can't stay for a chat; but, no matter, if your worthy mayor is in a hurry. I'm glad to know there is at least one man in the town willing to believe me. Good-night."

Hawkins briefly rejoined, stepped outside, and the mayor locked the door.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN ESCAPE AND A DILEMMA.

Mayor Grimes and Nate Hawkins had quite an animated discussion as they went back to the Metropolitan; but it ended as it had begun, the mayor firmly convinced that the prisoner was indeed Kid-Glove Kris, and the ex-mayor stubbornly contending that he was not.

Really, the mayor appeared to have the best of the argument, for the ex-mayor could bring little or no proof to back up his assertion. In build and in looks the prisoner was the very counterpart of Kid-Glove Kris, he had been found between Hard Pan and Devil's Pass, and his clothes proved that he had been in the water.

Nevertheless, Hawkins stuck to his first assertion, although he admitted again, as he had done before, that the lightning quickness with which the man had toppled the mayor over, in the jail, was very like what Kid-Glove Kris was quite capable of doing—in fact, that it had been very like Kid-Glove Kris's style of using his fist. In spite of that, however, he remained set in his opinion, and the mayor could not change him.

In the course of an hour the mayor did send the prisoner something to eat, not so much out of sympathy as because he wanted him to be in trim for the hearing on the morrow, and when the man had eaten he was handcuffed for the night and left to his meditations.

The jail was such a strong affair that it was not thought necessary to place a guard, usually, but one was stationed before the door on this occasion.

The prisoner was of more than usual importance.

Therefore, judge of the surprise when, next morning, the word went flying through the camp that Kid-Glove Kris had escaped!

No one could believe it true at first, but it was no false rumor, as those who ran to the jail were able to ascertain to their satisfaction, if to their chagrin at the same time.

While the mayor of the young city had much to say about the jail, it was really under the keeping of the sheriff, and a deputy of his had made the discovery that the prisoner had given them the slip. What was stranger than all, there was the guardsman on duty, innocent of any knowledge of the escape, if what he said was true.

The deputy had come at an early hour with the prisoner's breakfast, and had found the guardsman at his post.

The guardsman had no key to the door.

Exchanging morning greeting with the man, the deputy unlocked and opened the door, when, to his dismay, he discovered that the place was empty, the prisoner gone.

On the floor lay the handcuffs, locked together just as they had been on the man's wrists, and the deputy certainly had found the door secure. The guard expressed the greatest surprise, declaring most solemnly that he had not been a minute away from his post, yet knew nothing about the escape before that moment.

Here was yet more mystery.

The word was started, and the mayor and sheriff were sent for.

By the time they got around, for it was early, as said, there was a great crowd around the jail.

The mayor came down like a roaring lion, so to speak, and the sheriff, one Hickey by name, was scarcely less ex-

cited. Nate Hawkins, too, was considerably exercised.

"What is the meaning of this?" the mayor cried savagely.

"What in red-hot has been going on here, that the prisoner has got away?" demanded the sheriff.

"Hawkins," and the mayor turned fiercely upon the ex-mayor, "I believe that you have had a hand in this game. You were friendly with him."

"Wull, ye believe wrong," Hawkins responded stoutly. "Et is as much of a surprise to me as et kin be to anybody. Ef thar is anybody ter hold 'countable fer et, it is Gil Johnson hyer."

This was the guardsman, who, poor fellow, was as pale as a ghost and trembling at the knees.

"I—I don't know nothin' about et," he declared. "I have been right hyer all night, pacin' up and down and around, and I didn't know et till Bob Bowman opened ther door."

"It don't stand to reason," averred the mayor. "The door was the only way by which he could get out, and it has been opened at some time or other during the night, and if you didn't see it opened you must have been off your beat, or else you—"

"Else what, Mayor Grimes?"

"Or else you had a hand in it yourself."

The mayor looked hard at the fellow, but he stood the test.

"I didn't have no hand in et," he declared. "I thought he was safe in thar till Bowman found out he wasn't."

"Did you have a key to the door?"

"No, sir; you knew I didn't."

"What do you think of it, Hickey?"

"Hang me if I know what to think of it," was the sheriff's response.

"No, nur me," put in Hawkins. "Hyer was the door locked, and hyer wur the handcuffs locked. Et beats my time."

The mayor and the sheriff both got at the guardsman, cursing roundly at him, but the fellow stuck stoutly to his declaration that he knew nothing about it whatever.

And there they were. The prisoner gone, no one could tell when or how, and the guardsman stating positively that he had not been out of sight of the door of the jail the whole night from the time when he had come there on duty. It was a riddle.

It was one they could not guess.

And by the time it came to them to look for tracks around the building, that was useless.

Not only the crowd of the night before, but now this crowd again of the morning, had trampled everything so that it was useless to look for a clue in that direction.

There was but one thing to do, in the way of doing something half-way sensible, and that was to arrest the guard and put him in the jail himself, refusing to believe his version in the matter. Either he had had a hand in the matter or he had been away from his post or asleep.

But the fellow maintained that he was innocent of any one of the offenses charged, and took the late prisoner's place with most earnest protest, declaring that the devil must have been at the bottom of it all.

The only thing absolutely certain was that the prisoner was gone.

The mayor and the sheriff and the others started back to the hotel, hot over the affair.

"It beats thunder!" avowed the mayor. "Do you believe Gil Johnson knows more than he will tell?"

"I believe he was asleep, that is what I believe, and is afraid to own up to it," was the response. "Otherwise, it could not have happened."

"And I don't see how it did happen, anyhow."

"Nor I."

"Mebby Gil was about right," offered the ex-mayor, who was walking with them.

"And maybe I was right when I said I

believed you had a hand in it, Nate Hawkins," half-charged the mayor. "You were mighty friendly to Kid-Glove Kris."

"But, ding et, this man wasn't Kid-Glove Kris!"

"Bah! tell that to a tenderfoot."

"And, even ef it was, how could I help him? I had no key to ther jail, much less to ther handcuffs."

"I don't know; I don't say sure it was you; shouldn't think you would do such a thing; but who did do it? By thunder! the further we go the deeper into mystery we get."

"I opine you are about right."

"There has got to be a clearing up," averred the sheriff. "I have got to go away, Grimes, as you know, and I leave it all in your hands. That reward will have to be renewed."

"There is trouble enough over the first reward yet."

"How is that?"

"Why, to whom am I to pay it? Or am I to pay it at all? There are two sets of claimants."

"The deuce."

"Yes; the fellows who arrested Kid-Glove Kris at White Horse claim at least half of it, if it is paid at all, while the other fellows claim it all. They are red-hot about it."

"The first fellows have no claim to it."

"They hold that they have; they had the man first, and only for them the others would not have found him."

"Well, maybe there is something in that."

"But the second pair claim that the first pair did not earn it by delivering the prisoner up, which is true enough, while they, the latter couple, did. And so they have it."

"That's so, I guess, Pete."

"Yes; but just there the first couple raises the question as to whether the man they brought here really was Kid-Glove Kris, since the prisoner himself denied it and Hawkins here supported him."

"Then they forfeit their part of the reward."

"No, not if we let them have their way about it. If we hold that this man was Kid-Glove Kris, then they want a share. If it is decided that he wasn't the sport, then they claim that they deposited him dead at the bottom of Devil's Inkhorn. See how it is?"

"I see a chance to draw a line just half-way between, Grimes, and declare the reward off. The first couple did not deliver him; there is a question as to the identity of the man the second couple brought. Declare it off, and offer it again."

And that, accordingly, was done.

CHAPTER IX.

THE INQUEST.—A MEETING.

Then came the inquest.

That was the next thing in order, and the camp was eager for it.

Hard Pan was duly observant of the law in such cases, and by the time the inquest was called the people were in a fever.

The inquest was held in the Metropolitan—that being the largest room in the young city—because there all might have opportunity to see and hear, or very many, at any rate.

Witnesses had been notified, and were in attendance—save the stage driver, who had had to be off with his stage at daylight or a little after; and when the coroner had called the room to order he proceeded forthwith to the business in hand.

It was speedily accomplished. Miss Kenton, who was there in company with her step-mother and Lawyer Dougherty, testified to the discovery of the body lying in the road, and the other passengers to their parts in the matter. Miss Kenton exhibited the letters taken from the dead man's pocket, identifying some of them as letters written by herself to David Coleman, Denver.

She had no doubt but that this was David Coleman.

The body was now lying in its coffin, and the crowd passed around it in review, to see if any one there recognized the man.

This occupied some time, and when at last there were no others to view the remains there had not been one who had ever seen the man in life. That he was a stranger needed no further argument.

The case was given to the jury, who came to a decision without leaving their places—that David Coleman, a detective, from Denver, coming to Hard Pan to try to solve the mystery of the death of Thomas Kenton, had met his death at the hand of some person to the jury unknown.

That was all—all that could be done.

A funeral followed, Miss Kenton attending out of respect for the man who had died in her service, even though a stranger to her.

Mrs. Kenton went with Myra, for company, and after it was over they returned to their rooms at the hotel, where the widow had done all in her power to make the young lady feel at home.

"It is too bad that the man was killed," Mrs. Kenton remarked with a sigh, as they took seats.

"Yes; too bad, indeed," echoed Myra. "He might have been able to solve the mystery that overhangs my poor papa's death."

"Yes, and have cleared that innocent man who is accused of the deed," sighed the widow. "It is really too bad that circumstances should have directed suspicion to him."

"Then you hold him innocent, too—But you have already assured me that you do. Oh! I am sure he did not do it, Marie—you said I should call you by your first name. I am sure he did not do it. He is too noble; no one with a face like that could do a murder."

The widow dropped her eyes and slightly bit her lip while the younger woman spoke feelingly.

"Like you, I cannot believe that he did it," she assured. "I am not sorry that he has escaped—if, indeed, it was he, and I do not see how there can be any doubt about that. But how did he get out of Devil's Inkhorn? And how did he effect his escape from the jail? I confess that I am greatly puzzled, and I would like to see these mysteries cleared away."

"There are more mysteries than these; the very air here is heavy with mystery," murmured Myra.

"What do you mean, dear?"

"I might offend you, I fear."

"Offend me?" in wonderment.

"It was so strange that papa never told you that he had a daughter, and never told me of his marriage."

"We have already talked that over, Myra, and could arrive at no understanding. That was not what you meant in the remark you made just now. What did you mean?"

"You will not be offended? It was only a thought concerning something I heard on my way here, when the prisoner was in the stage."

"Of course, I will not be offended—not with you, at any rate. Pray tell me what you heard."

"You know they said papa and Mr. Dursey had a quarrel—"

"Yes; Mr. Kenton had some words with him."

"Well, they said it was because—because papa thought he was too attentive to you, and—and—"

"And what did Kid-Glove Kris say?"

"He did not hear."

"Then it was Uncle Josh told you that. I see. Well, it was so; but I assure you there was nothing in it. I loved your poor father far too well to give him the least cause for such suspicion."

The widow caught the orphaned daughter to her breast and embraced her; but, even as she did so, her face took on an expression of most malignant hatred, which Myra, in her position, could not see. While her voice was as the voice of

a dove, her face was like the face of a Fury!

We change the scene.

Up out of the gulch wherein reposed Hard Pan, over the "ridge" to the south, lay a pocket, barren and deserted.

It lacked water entirely; only a few scant scrubs existed here and there among the rocks and boulders, and as it also lacked gold, it was now seldom visited.

Prospectors had been there time and again, until every foot of it had been scrutinized, and, as absolutely no sign was to be found, they had pronounced it altogether bad; and, as the place was not easy of access, their word in the matter was generally accepted.

At the time of which we write, and about the hour marked by the break in narrative, a man was seated here on a boulder, alone.

He was one whom we have seen before; a large, finely formed, handsome person under thirty years of age, with clean-shaved face and graceful mustache.

His hair, eyes, and mustache were black. There was a look of impatience on his face, and he seemed to act as if he was looking for some one who was late in coming.

We have seen him before, but where?

Was he the prisoner of the stage, who took the daring leap from the cliff?

Was he the later prisoner of the jail, who had so mysteriously escaped during the night?

He was the one or the other.

Presently he sat more erect, listening. Evidently some one was coming.

He looked fixedly in a certain direction, when, around a pile of boulders, he saw approaching his own very counterpart—his twin brother, as any one would have declared.

The latter came forward, without a smile or look of recognition of any kind, and as he drew near he drew a brace of guns from beneath his jacket. This act was not hostile, however, for he reversed the weapons, and, on coming up, extended them, butts presented, to the person on the boulder.

He said never a word, and the man on the boulder recoiled a little, resting his left hand on the boulder, and thus they looked each other in the eyes for a moment.

The one who had waited was the first to speak.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean that you are to take your choice of these guns, and we will settle the matter," responded the other, soberly.

"Settle what matter?" in much surprise. "I am not aware that I have any difference with you, sir. Pray explain yourself."

"No difference. That is just it exactly, sir. One of us must be the real man and the other his ghost, and I thought this would be about as good a way as any to settle the matter. I don't know whether I am myself, whether you are me, or how it is."

The other had to laugh.

"As to that, I am in about the same uncertain state of mind, since seeing you," he admitted; "but I think your proposed plan would prove disastrous to one or both of us, for we both seem to be in the flesh and quite substantial."

"Well, maybe you are right," joining him in his laugh and putting away his guns. "I don't wonder that the people of Hard Pan were puzzled, and that you were taken for Kid-Glove Kris and handled accordingly. I doubt if two pins in a row ever looked more alike than you and I."

"Then you are the real Kid-Glove Kris?"

"Yes. And you?"

"I suppose I will have to play second fiddle and be known as Kid-Glove Kris Number Two."

"Ha! then you object to calling who you are, eh? I hardly expected that. I

thought we could compare notes and join hands in playing this game to the end."

"I shall require to see your hand before I show my own, sir. I have been pretty roughly handled on your account, and I feel that you owe me an explanation. You have kept me waiting a deuced long time, if you are the man whom I was told to expect."

"I am the man, and I beg your pardon for the delay. I have been down in the camp, attending the inquest of that poor fellow who was found murdered on the trail yesterday, trying to glean whatever else I could."

"You have been down in the camp, you say? How is it that you were not arrested?"

"Because they did not happen to recognize me."

"Ah! I see. And the fellow who was found murdered—what was the verdict? I heard something about the matter last night."

"Why, he was said to have been one David Coleman, a detective from Denver, who was coming to Hard Pan in the employ of Miss Kenton to solve the mystery of her father's death. I'm mighty sorry he was taken out of the field before he had a chance to investigate."

CHAPTER X.

EXCHANGE OF CONFIDENCE.

It was a strange interview.

Seldom it happens that two persons looking so nearly alike are thrown together.

And yet it does happen now and again, and almost any one can bring to mind instances of the kind, or can recall faces he has seen that have been of striking similarity.

Could the people of Hard Pan have seen the two men, as they were talking here together, they would have been puzzled which one to arrest as being the true Kid-Glove Kris. Little wonder, indeed, that they had been deceived in the man they had thrust into jail.

After the words recorded there was silence for a few moments.

The unknown was the first to speak.

"I take it, then, that you hold yourself to be innocent of the murder of Thomas Kenton," he intimated.

"Yes, I do so say; how about you?"

"What, would you hint that I may have done it?"

"Not at all; but, then, I would like to know. I answered your question; you answer mine."

"I did not do it, certainly."

"Can you prove that you did not do it?"

"I can, if it becomes necessary for me to do so. Can you?"

"No, if I get cornered and have to do so, I can't. I am anxious to keep out of such a situation."

"Is there any reason why you and I should not come to a full understanding?"

"None that I know of, unless you make it."

"What do you desire to do?"

"I want to learn who really did kill Thomas Kenton."

"And until that matter is cleared up I am in danger of being arrested for you."

"You certainly are, unless you are discreet enough to keep your head under cover. On the other hand, what if I am mistaken for you? Maybe it is as broad as it is long."

"I am a stranger in these parts."

"What business brought you here? Where do you hail from, anyhow?"

"Two questions that I am not prepared to answer at this time. If you want help in the work you are undertaking, though, I am your man."

"What work?"

"Clearing up the mystery of that murder."

"Oh! I see. You might only get yourself into jail again on my account."

"In which case you would no doubt use your best efforts to get me out again, I suppose."

"Certainly, for it would be rather tough to allow you to be hanged in my stead. And if I happened to be the one nabbed, you could return the compliment?"

"As far as possible, most assuredly. I can well imagine that we will give the good people of Hard Pan no end of trouble, if we enter into partnership in this matter, particularly my friend the mayor."

"Ha! there is something I want to speak about."

"What is that?"

"The mayor. He is no friend of mine, and you will want to look out for him all the time."

"I became aware of that last evening. He called me a liar, and I very promptly let him have my left in the neck and knocked him over."

"You knocked him down? I had not heard about that. I guess it was not generally known around the camp."

"Very likely not."

"Then you have made him all the more my enemy, and I shall have to be all the more on the alert for him. Likewise you will have to be careful not to foul with him."

"I'll try to be on my guard against him. But, what was your particular business with me? I was asked to remain here until you came."

"I want to befriend you."

"In what way?"

"You look like me, therefore you are in danger. I realized that and wanted to help you, if possible."

"Very well."

"In the first place, here is a snack to eat; next, here are a couple of guns for you—you have lost your own, of course. Then, if you are willing, I will assist you to disguise yourself."

"Well, you are dealing square with me, no mistake. I feel rather inclined to be ashamed for not taking you more fully into my confidence—in fact, I think a mutual exchange necessary to our further confidence in each other."

"I am willing to meet you half way. Do you believe me innocent?"

"I have no reason to believe you guilty."

"Nor have I you."

"I swear that I am innocent of any part or knowledge in the murder of Thoman Kenton."

"And I the same. But how about the man who was found on the road and who has just been buried at Hard Pan as David Coleman?"

Sport Number Two, as Nate Hawkins would have called him, gave a start.

"You don't think that I killed him?" he demanded.

"No; but some one else might ask you the question. Some one had a motive in killing that man."

"Undoubtedly."

"And was not his murderer also the slayer of Mr. Kenton?"

"How do you make that out?"

"Who else would have any dread of a detective to investigate the case?"

"But how could any one know that he was a detective from Denver, coming here a stranger, as he did?"

"You ask me more than I can answer. But it was just one of two things: Either some one did know, and laid for him, or else he was not David Coleman at all."

"You are now getting deeper into mystery than ever. If not what he seemed, how came he by the detective's papers? Who, then, murdered him, and for what reason? And, if he was not Coleman, what has become of the detective? Can you explain?"

"Perhaps this fellow met Coleman and held him up at a disadvantage and robbed him—mayhap murdered him."

"For what reason?"

"He may have recognized him, and may have had good reason to fear him. But Coleman may not have been murdered, though the other fellow's intention was good enough, and he may yet

turn up. In that case, nothing would give me greater pleasure than to join hands with him in the working out of these mysteries."

"And what if he became convinced, on hearing the story of the murder of Thomas Kenton, that you are indeed the man who did it, and set about hunting you down? There would be mighty little chance of working together with him in that case, I take for granted. But, you could easily set him right on that score."

"How?"

"By taking him into your confidence, telling him where you were on the night of the murder, why you went away just at that time, and where you have been since."

"Well, I would do that, conditionally."

"And what would be the condition?"

"That he would prove to my satisfaction that he was indeed Coleman, the detective."

"I have no doubt he would undertake to do that. But there would be about as much a lack of confidence as between you and me, I imagine."

"That there is a lack of confidence between us is your fault. You know who I am, but you keep me in the dark as to your own identity. If we are to work together, we must up visors. Are you David Coleman?"

"I am David Coleman, the detective!"

CHAPTER XI.

PLEDGING THEIR SUPPORT.

The two men at once clasped hands.

And, as they clasped hands, they each laid a hand upon the other's shoulder.

Thus they stood, in silence, for a moment, looking into each other's eyes, as if each was trying to read the inward thoughts of the man before him.

"I felt sure of it," said Kid-Glove Kris, as they gave a final shake and parted hands.

"And you are a shrewd fellow," said the other. "It will be a pleasure to work with you."

"Then you fully trust me?"

"Fully."

"What am I to call you, as an offset for my own handy appellation?"

"I am called Detective Dave by my friends. You may apply the same name to me, if you like."

"And I like thoroughly. We are now coming to an understanding, and if we are not able to clear this matter up it will be funny. But we have got work to do."

"I am well aware of that."

"Let me hear your story."

"You have no other confidant?"

"None; what you have to tell will remain with me."

"Very well. I am fully convinced that you are a square fellow, that you are innocent of the crime that is set down to your credit, and that you are thoroughly in earnest in your expressed intention of getting at the truth of the matter."

"You may safely pin your faith to those points, Detective Dave."

"Very well again. Now, I am the man whom Miss Myra Kenton engaged to come here to ferret out the mystery of her father's murder. I was coming incognito, of course, and thought it better, for my purpose, to make the last stage of the journey on foot, so as to drop into the camp unnoticed. Hence, I avoided the stage and tramped."

"I see."

"Well, yesterday morning the fellow who was found dead on the trail when the stage came along held me up at the point of a gun and made me hand over my little all. It was as you guessed; he came upon me unawares and took me at a disadvantage, and there I was. I had to comply, as the best of us must under like conditions. But his last trick was something unlooked for. He suddenly struck me on the head with his gun, and my light went out."

"That was rough."

"Rather. When I came to I was lying in the water with my nose and mouth barely above the surface, thanks to the fact of my having lodged against a sunken rock with my shoulders; and I was almost chilled to the bone. I got out, somehow, and having nothing to warm me up, I took to running up and down to get my blood in circulation. When I felt a little better I turned my face in this direction, and was trudging along painfully enough when two horsemen came up behind me and took me a prisoner as Kid-Glove Kris."

"That must have been a surprise."

"It was. I thought they were joking at first, but I speedily found out that they were in dead earnest. Then I thought they must be drunk, but there was nothing to prove such to be the case—in fact, the contrary. I protested, but was only laughed at, and at last I had to come to the conclusion that I had fallen into the hands of a brace of lunatics. I had never heard of such a man as Kid-Glove Kris—if Miss Kenton knew anything about you she did not mention it to me, so I was all in the dark. Then when I got to Hard Pan I thought all creation had gone crazy, and— But, you know the rest."

"Yes, I know the rest. Why did you not declare who you were?"

"Why, for the reason that I wanted to preserve my incognito if possible, you see."

"True enough; needless question to have asked. Now, the mystery—who killed the man who waylaid you, and for what reason?"

"Are we sure that the dead man was the one who held me up?"

"Do you think there is reason to doubt it?"

"Hardly; but I did not see the body, you know."

"I did, and can describe him to you."

"Do so."

Kid-Glove Kris complied.

"The same man, not a doubt of it. But how did you get to see the body?"

"I was at the inquest, as I told you. The public were requested to view the remains, to see if any one had ever seen the man in life, and I fell in with the procession."

"I might have known without asking. We are not exerting our wits very greatly, I guess."

"Because it is not necessary in this exchange."

"Perhaps."

"There, then, we run up against another mystery. Some one hereabouts knew the man who held you up, and had a reason for removing him. Who was it?"

"That is for us to find out. Kid-Glove Kris, we have got our hands full here, what with keeping out of the clutches of the sheriff and his deputies, and at the same time trying to unravel the snarl."

"You are right, Detective Dave."

"Well, you have my story; now what about your own? How much are you willing to reveal to me in return?"

"You have a claim upon me for the whole business."

"But I shall not press the claim beyond what is reasonable, if there is anything you ought to keep secret."

"For the sake of a full confidence in me it is only right that you should know everything that I can tell you. There is enough mystery without mine."

"As you please."

"Besides, I need your help in a private matter."

"Ha!"

"Yes, there is still another chapter to unfold—as it were—in which I am concerned."

"Well, let me have the whole situation, then. If you need my help I none the less need yours, so we are about evenly matched. Perhaps we have been thus thrown together for a purpose."

"Perhaps; who can say."

"Well, your story."

"You will not want it all; merely what concerns us in the present business."

"As you please."

"We can unfold ourselves to each other further, as we get better acquainted and have more time. Business first, you know, and pleasure after."

"Very well."

"Here, then, is the thing in a nutshell: Some sneaking cur is after my life, and I have thus far been unable to tell who it is and what the motive. No less than three attempts have been made, the last on the night when Thomas Kenton was murdered."

"Indeed!"

"Just as I tell you. I got on track of the fellow, and made it lively for him for a time, but he eluded me at last. I kept on after him for a good while, and remained on the ground in disguise to catch him, even after he had given me the slip, but at last I had to give it up. I then set out on my return to Hard Pan, when I was arrested at White Horse."

"Now, you may believe it or not, but that was the first I knew of the death of Thomas Kenton. I took in the whole situation at a glance, and saw how useless it would be for me to tell my story then, for who would believe it? All the circumstances were against me, so I resolved to hold my tongue and save my breath, and lie low for another chance at my secret foe. The fact that the attempt had been made on my life the same night when Kenton was murdered, made me think that his murderer and my foe were perhaps one and the same person. I knew it would never do to be taken to Hard Pan a prisoner with the populace excited and the mayor against me, so I took that desperate leap from the stage, and— Well, here I am."

"And here is a thought: Maybe Mayor Grimes is the man who sought your life and killed Kenton."

"No, no, you wrong him there. He and Kenton were good friends, and he has not been absent from Hard Pan. No, no, it is deeper than that, and it is for you and me to work it out."

CHAPTER XII.

A CHAPTER OF COMEDY.

Hard Pan had a unique character in the person of one Billy Blow—that was his real name—and another in his wife.

When a man and a woman are united in the bonds of holy matrimony it is said that they are made one. This is all right and proper and quite as it should be, but in this instance Mrs. Blow was the one.

She wore the breeches, not only figuratively but literally—If a pair of voluminous bloomers can by any stretch of the imagination be called breeches, and the rest of her attire was not greatly unlike that worn by her husband. She was a woman's rights advocate, and posed as a model of woman emancipated.

A member of a "new women's club" somewhere, she was likewise a subscriber to two or three publications that boomed the cause of her down-trodden sex—to the tune of two dollars a year each; and what she couldn't think of on her own account in the way of argument for her cause, these seditious journals supplied her with.

At first she had had the complaint in only a mild form, but the symptoms had rapidly heralded the advance of the malady, until at last it had become chronic.

Mr. Blow had objected, but his objecting had only served to fan the flames, as it were.

Finding his objections overruled, he had gradually given way.

Now, this same Blow—surnamed William—had to that time been a faithful, hard-working man, who had minded his own business strictly and had supported his wife as became their station.

He had been a stay-at-home-at-nights,

seldom entered the saloons or indulged in anything stronger than the coffee contained in his dinner pail, and had been an all-around good and worthy citizen. But now all that was changed. He no longer worked and the saloons had an attraction for him.

The change had been gradual, of course, but it had been effectual.

The couple had no children—a blessing, under the circumstances, and Mrs. Blow was getting about all the freedom her soul had craved.

She, by the way, called herself Mrs. Brown-Blow—her maiden name having been Brown and she having the fad, along with her other afflictions, of not allowing her maiden identity to be lost sight of altogether.

As Billy had gradually sought consolation and companionship in the flowing bowl and the saloons, as home had gradually become too new-womanish to be home any longer, the family income had gradually dwindled, as he earned less and spent more.

Here was a chance for Mrs. Brown-Blow to come to the rescue and prove herself equal to the emergency as a new woman. Indeed, she found she would have to hustle or go hungry, so she began by taking a boarder or two to replenish the depleted exchequer, and ended by opening up a boarding-house to the full capacity of her abode.

At the time of our story the change had been made about complete, and Billy Blow seemed quite content to have things as they were.

He did not have to toil, neither spin, and yet he was clothed—after a fashion—and fed. He had nothing to complain of, save perhaps that he did not have much money to handle.

New-comers to the camp looked upon him as a good-for-nothing, and commiserated Mrs. Brown-Blow upon her hard lot; but when once they heard the story and learned that she had brought about the change by her reach for freedom they generally gave her cold sympathy.

It was the afternoon of the day of which the preceding chapter treated, and Billy Blow was sunning himself in front of the Metropolitan Saloon.

He was ragged, half-primed—as he would have expressed it—and, in consequence, happy.

Not a large man, he looked even smaller since he had gone to the bad.

Presently a shadow fell athwart his person, and he looked up.

Mrs. Brown-Blow stood before him, arms akimbo.

Other loungers-around, for this was the "city center," as we have described it, roused up with the expectancy of seeing a little fun.

There she stood, her mannish hat on her head, her mannish coat flung open and exposing her mannish vest—which, by the way, did not inclose a very mannish bosom—and her legs apart in a very mannish fashion.

She was a tall woman, plenty in flesh, and had been accounted as not bad looking—before the change, when she wore proper attire as became her station and was simply Mrs. Blow. Like the pictures of "before" and "after" to some patent nostrum, she might be called the "before."

Her expression was vinegary.

"You Billy Blow!"

So she fired at her erstwhile lord and master, in three separate and distinct discharges—as it were.

Billy looked up at her in a half sullen, half stupid fashion, as if resenting any interference with his innocent indulgence in a sun bath, if that suited him.

"You! Bill! Blow!"

"Well, Mrs. Brown-Blow, what is it?" Billy lazily inquired.

"You a-settin' here a-lazin' away your time, and a-leavin' me to do all the work of the house—"

"Go right ahead, Mrs. Brown-Blow, go right ahead," said Billy, with a wave of the hand indicative of her perfect

liberty as far as he was concerned. "I'm not interferin'."

"No, I know you're not, you brute!" she fired at him. "You have sunk so low that you can't realize what a state you have come to. You had order be most heartily ashamed of yourself, to see your wife working to support you, while you jist set all day and do nothin'."

"You have got what ye was dyin' to git," drawled Billy. "You wanted to take that business out of my hands; you wasn't happy till you'd done it; don't let me interfere with any of your arrangements, Mrs. Brown-Blow. You have got ther hull shebang to yerself."

"That is jist what's the matter; I want you to come home this minnit and help me."

"What ter do?"

"I have taken two more boarders, and some changes has got to be made; do you understand?"

"Well, make 'em, Mrs. Brown-Blow, make 'em," with another wave of the hand expressive of his full and free consent to anything and everything. "Don't let me stand in the way."

"As if I, a free woman, would ask your approval!"

"That is it, Mrs. Brown-Blow, that is jist it. I wonder that ye did. Go right ahead."

"But I want your help; can't you understand? I want your help. These two men insist on the side room on the ground floor, so they can come and go when they please."

"Let 'em take et, Mrs. Brown-Blow, let 'em take et," with another condescending wave of the hand. "Don't fer a minnit think that I'm goin' to kick; let 'em have the hull ranch, if they want it, fer all of me. Go right ahead and do jist as you please."

"Humph! as if a new woman wouldn't!"

"Then why the mischief don't ye? What be ye botherin' me about 'et fer, I'd like ter know?"

"Bill Blow, you're a fool! You have allowed your brains to git so rum-addled that you don't know nothin'! You don't even 'preciate you wife as you'd order!"

Bill simply shrugged his shoulders and crossed his legs the other way.

"Here I am, doing business alone and keeping you in your laziness, which many another woman wouldn't do, I'd have you to know; and you refuse to come and lend me a hand with movin' beds and the like."

"Movin' beds? This is the first you have said anything about et, Mrs. Brown-Blow. Whar is your Chineese? Why don't you call on him?"

Mrs. Brown-Blow employed a Chinese cook and man of all work.

She no longer cooked.

"He had to go to pray to his joss this afternoon, that's where he is, and I ain't got no help and that room has got to be got ready—kin you git that through your thick head?"

"Oh! I see; it is ther Chineese that's ter blame," said Billy, looking wise. "Had to go pray to his joss, had he? Mrs. Brown-Blow, I be gummed if I was a 'mancipated woman if I would have any Chineese around me that had to go off to pray to his joss—no, I be gummed if I would!"

The new woman stamped her foot and flung her arms in despair.

"But he has gone, I tell you," she shouted at him, "and that room has got to be got ready before the two men come. Can't you understand?"

"Understand ut perfectly, Mrs. Brown-Blow, and I say I be gummed ef I would stand et, if I was a new woman, like you! Why don't he tie his joss around his blamed yaller neck, and carry ut with him? What business has he got to sneak off in that fashion—"

"Bill Blow, you git less and less sense every day of your life! You don't know half as much as you did when I first married you, and you didn't know a

whole lot then! But I'll fix you; you have got to sleep in the outshed now, do you understand—in the outshed. Two new boarders are goin' to take the side room and the man who was there will take yours. Kin you understand that?"

"Make your own arrangements, Mrs. Brown-Blow, make your own arrangements," with a dismissing wave, and Billy closed his eyes to continue his bath, the new woman stalking away in a mannish fashion and in a decidedly mannish passion.

The crowd enjoyed it immensely, winking and nodding to one another, but were careful to make no remark loud enough to reach the ears of the emancipated woman.

As her steps receded Billy slowly lifted his head and looked, and as slowly winking his eye, settled down for another siesta.

CHAPTER XIII.

EXPRESSING A SUSPICION.

Hard Pan was mystified beyond measure.

We must turn back a little and take up the thread of events immediately following the funeral of the supposed David Coleman.

Certain events have been mentioned—a short interview between Myra Kenton and her young step-mother, introduced for a purpose; and the chapter of comedy with which the preceding installment closed.

That, too, contained something of deeper moment than appeared upon the surface.

But, to turn back.

After the funeral of the supposed Coleman, when Mrs. Kenton and Myra returned to their rooms at the hotel, Mayor Grimes and Nate Hawkins walked away together in the direction of the Wingate Mines.

These mines, by the way, were the Kenton property.

Since the death of Mr. Kenton they had been under the supervision of a young man named Edward Sawyer.

Grimes and Hawkins had no object in going in that direction, beyond a desire to separate themselves from the crowd for a little private consultation regarding matters of moment.

Hawkins was a man of hard horse sense, a fair representative of the old original population of the camp. In spite of the fact that they differed upon almost every question that arose, Grimes often consulted him. Grimes represented the newer element in the young city, which had overthrown the older.

"Now, Nate," said Grimes, "I want to know just what you think of this matter, all the way through, from beginning to end. As mayor of this town, I have got to do something to clear it up. It has gone just about far enough, now, and the sooner it is stopped, the better. Now, you have got a long, hard head, and I want your candid opinion of the whole business."

"Wall, durn et, Pete," responded Hawkins, "we have talked et bone dry fifty times at least, and thar ain't nothin' new, 'cept the mystery of this detective feller we have jist planted, and that of 'tother feller's escape out ov ther jail. That, and the fact that you and me can't hit it about the 'dentity of that chap. You hold that he was Kid-Glove Kris, and I am jist as sartain that et wasn't him, and thar we stik."

"It is useless for us to talk about that, for we both have our opinions about it. How he got out of jail, though, is quite another matter, and that is something that I want to talk with you about."

"If thar is anything left to talk on; we have picked et down to the pinfeathers, I reckon."

"How did he escape?"

"That is jist one too many fur me, Pete."

"Well, then, what is your opinion concerning Gil Johnson? Not likely we'll agree; we never do."

"You hinted at first that you thought I had had a hand in the matter. Have you got that chunk of foolishness out of yer head? If ye have, mebbly we kin agree."

"Yes, I take that all back, Nate. I was hot and hasty when that came out."

"All right, we'll let that drop, then."

"Well, about Johnson?"

"Thar's one of three things sartain sure."

"Name them."

"They have been named a'ready: He had a hand in et, was away from his post, or else was sound asleep."

"We agree, for a wonder. But, now, to narrow it, which of the three do you think it was? Let us see if we can agree any further in the matter, and I hope we can."

"Wull, to begin with, I don't believe he had a hand in it himself."

"You don't?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Wull, I have knowed Gil Johnson fer a long time, and I pride myself that I kin tell purty straight when a man is lyin' and when he is, tellin' the cold truth."

"And you think he told the truth?"

"When you 'cused him of havin' a hand in it, he met your eye straight as a die, and declared that he hadn't. I know him, as I say, and I know he told you the truth when he said that. As to his bein' asleep or away from his post, I ain't so sartain."

"Well, I see we are bound to differ."

"Then you think he had a hand in it?"

"I do."

"You are wrong, Pete, dead wrong. Besides, he had no key, you know that."

"So he said, and so we thought, but was it so? He had time enough to make away with the key, you know. Somebody may have supplied the key."

"Hillo! Then you have got another s'picion in some other direction, have ye?"

"No, no; do not understand me that way; I am only guessing."

"Wull, it is a wide guess, mayor."

"How do you know it is?"

"I have told you—because I know Gil didn't lie when he looked you in the eye and said he hadn't a hand in it."

"Well, we are coming at it, Nate. Do you think, if we go to the jail together to see him, that you can tell which of the other theories is true and which false?"

"Mebby I kin, Pete."

"Then let us go there, and we will see. I will put the questions to him, and you can watch for the truth as it appears in his face."

They stopped and turned back toward the jail.

They had gone nearly all the way to the mine office and buildings, and as they turned a voice hailed them.

"Mayor Grimes—Nate!"

They stopped and looked.

It was Ed. Sawyer, the acting manager of the mines.

He came out of the office and walked in their direction, and they waited for him to come up.

"Thought you were coming to the office," he said as he came up. "You are the man I want to see, mayor, but I can speak in front of Nate, of course. I want to say something about that jail mystery."

"Ha! what do you know?" Grimes exclaimed and demanded.

"Not much, but maybe something that will throw a little light upon the mystery of that man's escape."

"Why didn't you mention it before, then?"

"Because I didn't attach any importance to it till I got to thinking it over carefully. I was up here at the office until a late hour last night, at work on the books."

"Well?"

"When I went to the hotel, a woman entered just ahead of me, letting herself in with a key by the side door. The front way is always open, you know, and she could have gone in that way, the same as I did. It looks as if she did not desire to be seen."

"Well?"

"That is all."

"Thunder! what does that amount to?"

"That is according to how you look at it. I have just guessed who that woman was."

"You have guessed who it was—that will not do. If you did not know her, your evidence will be of no use—that is to say, would be of no use, if you had any further knowledge."

"I did not recognize her at the time, but now I am quite sure that it was Mrs. Kenton. If that is true, just put two and two together. She knew that Kid-Glove Kris had been arrested, and, if rumor be true, she would have some slight interest in freeing him."

"And would you dare to go to her and name this suspicion?"

"Well, no, that wouldn't do, but I thought you might work on it quietly and see if there is anything in it. She might have bribed Gil Johnson to help the man out, and, naturally, he wouldn't give it away—you couldn't draw it out of him by force. Don't mention it, mayor; wouldn't have told you if I had thought you would; but just look into it and see if there is anything in it. If she was out at that hour, where was she, and for what purpose?"

CHAPTER XIV.

TWO FACTS HIT UPON.

Having said his little say, Mr. Sawyer waved his hand and started to return to the office.

Mayor Grimes looked after him with a scowl, and then he and Nate Hawkins looked at each other for a moment in silence. The mayor was the first to speak.

"Well, what do you think of that?" he demanded, as they started on in the direction of the jail.

"How close did he strike to your own idea?" asked Nate.

"To my idea?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"Jist what I ask ye—how close does he strike to your own suspicion in the matter?"

"Well, you will have to make it plainer than that. I am not good at riddles, and never was. I am not aware that I have mentioned that I had a suspicion."

"No, ner ye didn't need to. I knowed it."

"You knew it?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"When you said somebody might 'a' supplied him with a key. Don't ye remember, I asked if you had a suspicion in another direction? I lighted onto ther widdy ter once."

"Yes, and you said it was a wide guess."

"I know I did."

"Then how do you bring the two ideas together to make anything out of it?"

"See hyer, Pete, you know and I know that this hyer widdy had a sneak-in' likin' fer Kid-Glove Kris. If anybody would 'a' helped him out of jail, she was the one."

"But, you hold that it was not Kris at all."

"She didn't know that, or, ruther, she thought the same as you do, that it was him."

"Well?"

"Wall, I said that I didn't believe that Gil had a hand in it. But, I have a s'picion that ther woman had, and somehow she got Gil off his guard or he was asleep when it happened."

"Can't agree with you, can't agree with you at all, Nate."

"Et would be funny ef ye could."
 "In the first place, that woman's husband has been murdered, and she would not take the risk of letting out any man that had not positively cleared himself of the suspicion."
 "But she believed him innocent; she said so."

"No matter, all she was insisting on was a fair trial. No, you and Ed are on the wrong track, there."

"Well, I hope so. But we'll find out, mebby, when we git to the jail. You take the lead in the talk, and I'll keep my eyes open to see when you are hot and when you are cold, as they used ter say in the old game when I was a kid."
 "All right, and we'll soon be there."

A few moments more, and they were at the jail.

The mayor had the key, or one of them—for there were more than one, and he opened the door and they entered.

Gil Johnson was pacing the floor, chafing under his confinement, and he greeted them with no friendly show of spirit. His actions certainly bespoke his innocence.

"Well, Gil, how are you making it go?" the mayor cheerfully inquired.

"Cussed slow," was the growl. "I s'pose when you git tired of keepin' me hyer, you will let me out."

"I'll let you out this minute, if you will own up to the truth so we can come at the bottom of this mystery. We want to know how that man got out of here."

"And I have told you that I don't know."

"Yes, but that don't go down, you know. It was your business to be on the lookout, and he couldn't get out of here without your knowing it."

"He did, though, all the same. He was simply gone when Bob opened the door, and that's all I know about it. It is a mystery to me, jest as much as it is to you, and more."

"Et don't stand to reason, Gil," put in Nate.

"Can't help it, Nate, it is gospel fact, every word of it, jest as I tell ye."

"You swear that you didn't let him out, do you?" asked the mayor.

"Yes, I swear it, hard and fast."

"Well, taking that for true, one of two other things is positive."

He waited a moment.

"What's them?" the guardsman asked.

"You were either asleep—"

"I swear to man I wasn't asleep."

"Or else you were away from your post far enough so that you did not know what was going on here."

"No, on my word I wasn't. I tell ye it was jist as I have said; he got out without my knowin' how he got out, and the first I knowed of it was when Bob opened the door."

Nate had given the mayor a sign.

"That is altogether out of reason, Gil," the mayor urged. "Admitting that you were not asleep, which I am inclined to believe, there remains one other fact that you must have been away from the door, for he came out by the door and no other way."

"No, I—"

"Will you swear to it?"

"What is the use? But, yes, if I must, I will swear—"

"Don't swear to a lie, Gil," interrupted Nate Hawkins. "We have hit the truth this time."

"No, on my—"

"Et ain't no use, Gilbert. The best thing you kin do is to make a full showin' of yer whole hand. Who was the woman you talked with about—"

The prisoner gave a start.

"What woman?" he demanded.

"The one you talked with about one o'clock this mornin'—"

"I didn't talk with no woman about one o'clock this mornin'," the prisoner stoutly denied.

"Et ain't no use, Gilbert, I tell ye," Nate insisted. "You was away from yer

post, or the prisoner couldn't 'a' got away. And thar was a woman in the case—"

"How do you know thar was, Nate Hawkins?"

"No matter how, long as we do know it. Come, now, own up like a little man—"

"I don't own up to nothin'," with a snarl, and he continued pacing the floor. "I have said my say, and you won't take my word, so make the most of it."

"That settles et, mayor," said Hawkins.

"Settles what?" asked Grimes.

"You won't git nothin' more out of Gil, so we mought as well vamose."

"But he has got to tell!" cried the mayor, showing anger. "I must know how that man got out of here."

"I don't know nothin' to tell," declared the prisoner. "Keep me here till I rot, and my answer will still be the same. I tell ye it is a mystery to me, Mayor Grimes."

"Come on," urged Hawkins. "Thar ain't nothin' to be made hyer."

"But, what about Johnson?" the mayor asked.

"That is fery you to say," responded Hawkins. "Ef it was me, I would let him go. He swears to what he says, and we can't prove nothin' against him."

He gave Grimes a wink as he said it.

"Well, I will let him go, I guess," the mayor decided. "Maybe you are telling the truth, Gil. If you are, it would be rough on you to keep you here for nothing. Git!"

He freed the man and let him go, and the fellow went off sullenly.

"That was it," said Nate, as he and the mayor left the building a moment later. "He was away from his post, and thar was a woman in the case. I'll sorter keep an eye on him, on ther sly."

CHAPTER XV.

MYRA MAKES A CONFESSION.

The interview between Mrs. Kenton and Myra about this time was broken off abruptly, to introduce the scene in the barren pocket at that particular place.

We left them in each other's embrace, Myra with her face buried upon her young step-mother's shoulder, and the widow with a look of hatred upon her countenance. There was no mistaking that expression; it boded ill for Myra Kenton. It might mean her death.

And yet, as said, there was nothing in the woman's voice to betray it, and when, presently, Myra raised her head and their eyes met, the evil look had vanished and in its stead was an expression of tenderness and love.

Plainly, then, Mrs. Kenton was a dangerous woman.

"No, I could hardly believe it, after I saw you," said Myra. "Papa was certainly mistaken, and people should not say such things."

"Nothing in it, my dear, I assure you. But your father was very fond of me, and he was of a jealous nature. I will tell you all about it, if you care to listen."

"No, no, do not speak of it further; that would indicate that I do not fully trust you."

"Nonsense, my dear. I know you do trust me."

"Indeed I do, now."

"Well, then, let me tell you. It is no long story; it can be told in a few words. Your father's time and attention were greatly taken up at the mines, you must know, and I was left a great deal of the time alone. There is very little company here—company of our kind, you understand. I was introduced to Mr. Dursey, and he used to talk with me on the piazza. Once or twice he walked with me as far as the mines. That was all; not another thing to cause jealousy; and, as soon as I saw your father was displeased I avoided Mr. Dursey all I could."

"But—"

"What, dear?"

"I was on the point of asking an impertinent question."

"No, it cannot be that, so ask it. Let me clear myself in your sight; I care nothing for what others may think or say."

"I was going to ask you if he further forced his attentions on you."

"Why, no, he took the hint."

"And it was after that that papa quarreled with him?"

"Yes. I will tell you how that was: I rode up the gulch one afternoon—I am very fond of riding; are you? We will go out often. As I was going to say—I went up the gulch one afternoon, and rode farther than usual. On the way home my saddle girth broke, and I had to walk home, carrying the saddle—or, at any rate I would have had to carry it if I had not fallen in with Mr. Dursey. It was quite accidental. It was getting late, and he walked back to the camp with me. He could not fix my saddle, and I could not ride his, and he would not ride and see a lady walk."

"Of course."

"Well, it was after night when we got here, and Mr. Dursey went right to your father and delivered me, as it were, safe and sound back into his keeping, telling him all about it. But your father's jealousy was aroused, and this unfortunate occurrence made it only the worse. He abused Mr. Dursey, and by so doing heaped insult upon me, but I forgave him because I loved him and understood how very fond he was of me. Mr. Dursey acted the part of a gentleman throughout, and withdrew as gracefully as possible, not even resenting anything further than to defend my good name. And that was all, my dear."

"Too bad it should have happened."

"Yes, indeed. Then followed your father's mysterious murder, and the suspicion fell at once upon Kid-Glove Kris. Can you wonder that I cannot believe him guilty of the crime?"

"Indeed, no. Do not I hold the same view?"

"Yes."

"What can you tell me about the gentleman, Marie—I call you by your name, though I feel I should say mother."

For a single instant a look, hard to describe, came into the woman's eyes. The next moment she sweetly smiled. Myra had noticed the look, and she did not know how to interpret it.

"Did I not tell you to call me by my first name?" she asked. "Indeed, I requested it of you. You quite startled me by the word mother, by reminding me of my own. No, no, do not apply that name to me; let us be more as sisters. There is not so great a difference in our ages."

"And I beg your pardon, Marie. But what can you tell me about Kid-Glove Kris?"

"Well, he is a gentleman in manners, but he is a professional sport, if you know what that means. In his case it means that he lives by gaming, or any other manner of getting money out of sport."

"Then he is not honest?"

"There you mistake; they say he is honest to the penny, and as honorable as honest. But why do you ask these things?"

"Because—because, I feel an interest in him. I am sure he did not kill papa, and for that reason I feel sorry that he should be thought guilty of having done the deed."

"Is that all?"

"All?"

"Yes."

The girl hung her head, and her face was suffused.

"I fear it is not all, my dear," said the other. "I am a woman myself, you must not forget."

"Then you read the truth?" asked Myra, looking up into her face with all confidence. "If you do, tell me what to

do. You are a woman, and you know I was helpless against it."

"Then you do love him, do you?"

"I suppose it must be that. I cannot dismiss him from my thoughts, and I feel as if I would die if I thought I would never see him again."

"You poor, dear child, how very unfortunate it is. You must know that he is not your equal—that a marriage with him would be utterly out of the question. You must dismiss him from your thoughts."

"Impossible, impossible. He is a part of my own life, I am sure of it. Oh, I wish I had never come here."

She buried her face in her hands.

The instant she did so, that malignant expression came again into the face of her companion.

But it quickly vanished, and once more she caught Myra to her breast, with all the warmth a mother could have shown.

And she not only embraced, but fondly kissed her.

Nothing but the fullest confidence could have led Myra to open her heart to her as she had done.

"Well, there is only one cure for it," said Marie. "You will be thrown into his company, no doubt, if he is cleared of the suspicion, so that he can come here openly, and you will soon find that it is impossible."

"Do you want to break my heart quite?" the girl asked.

"Break your heart?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"You mention the thing I least of all desire. Can you not understand me?"

"Ah! then you would throw yourself away upon him, if possible? Well, well, love will not pay heed to reason. I pity you, my child, is all I can say. The future must take care of itself."

"But we must save him."

"Ah! there is a thought: Yes, we must save him, no matter what comes after that. Loving him, you can be of greatest service to him in his time of need, and, together, we must establish his innocence somehow. I will help you all in my power, my child."

Myra returned her embrace, and doing so, could not see the look that came into her eyes or the hard smile that curled her lips for a moment.

While they were thus clasped in each other's arms, there came a knock at the door.

Mrs. Kenton rose and opened the door, and admitted Gilbert Dougherty.

The lawyer came in, bowing and scraping humbly.

What had brought him?

CHAPTER XVI.

A LETTER AND A DOUBT.

"Your pardon, ladies, your pardon for this intrusion," said the lawyer, "I would never have come thus unannounced, had it not been important."

"No apology needed, sir," said Mrs. Kenton. "Pray, take a seat, Mr. Dougherty. We were only having a confidential chat, my dear Myra and I, and it had come to an end just as you knocked."

"Ah! then, perhaps my excuse is acceptable. I will come at once to the business that has brought me here, and not trouble you long with my presence," as he sat down and placed his tall hat beside him on the floor, and he opened his coat and took a letter from his pocket.

Mrs. Kenton and Myra watched him with much interest.

"Here is a letter," he said, "that has just come to me in rather a mysterious manner. I went into my office a few minutes ago, after having been out for a little while, and this letter was lying on the floor."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Marie.

"Yes, lying on the floor, and how it came there I do not know—probably never shall know, for the door was

locked. There it was, however, and, as you see, it was addressed to me."

He held it up so that they might see, not yet taking the contents from the envelope.

"Yes, yes," eagerly.

"Naturally, I opened it, and this," drawing out the letter, "was what it contained."

With a polite bend he handed the folded sheet of paper to Mrs. Kenton, accompanying his bow with a slight flourish of the hand that was inimitable.

The widow accepted it, her face slightly pale as she did so, but on her opening it and glancing at the signature her pallor vanished, and for a moment a flush overspread her face.

"From Mr. Dursey," she spoke in low tone.

"From Kid-Glove Kris?" asked Myra.

"Yes, from him, dear."

"Read it."

The widow complied, reading as follows:

"Gilbert Dougherty:

"Dear Sir:—I desire to have it generally known that it was not I that was a prisoner in the jail last night. You will please exhibit this letter to Mayor Grimm and to any others you may think proper. Especially do me the favor to make it known to those who believe me innocent of the murder of Mr. Kenton—which I swear that I am.

"Yours truly,

"CHRISTOPHER DURSEY."

Mrs. Kenton looked at Myra the moment she had done reading, then at the lawyer, folding the letter, which she handed back to him.

Myra's face was flushed, and there was a bright light in her eyes.

The widow was somewhat pale, but was calm.

"What do you think of it, Mr. Dougherty?" she asked. "Do you think this is really from Kid-Glove Kris?"

"Why, I have no reason to think otherwise, madam," was the reply. "I have seen his handwriting many times, and this is certainly his hand. No, there can be no doubt."

"Then, is it possible that there is another man looking so nearly like him that the difference cannot be told? It is wonderful."

"Such must be the case, Mrs. Kenton."

"Who can the other be, then?" queried Myra, her eyes wide with wonder.

"Who, indeed?" repeated Marie. "It does not seem as if it can be true. And yet, here is the proof of it."

"You know Nate Hawkins maintained from the first that the prisoner was not Kid-Glove Kris," reminded Mr. Dougherty. "But, hardly any one else would believe it."

"Can you wonder?" said Mrs. Kenton.

"Not a bit. I hadn't a doubt of the man's identity myself."

"Have you shown this to any one besides us?"

"Not yet. You see, I took the last part of it as being the most important, and thought I would come right to you with it, knowing that you believe fully in his innocence."

"Well, I am glad you did. My dear Myra, too, believes him innocent of her father's murder, and we hope at least to win for him a fair trial, should he be captured. Show the letter, Mr. Dougherty, show it widely, and win as many converts as you possibly can."

The lawyer had a habit, when thinking hard or when a new idea struck him of rubbing his thumb and forefinger up and down the bridge of his nose.

This he did now, with some vigor, looking at Mrs. Kenton.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked.

"Ah! your pardon," he said, quickly, stopping immediately the outward manifestation of his thinking process. "It was just a random idea that popped into

my mind. Of course, it cannot be of any consequence."

"How are we to judge of that, Mr. Dougherty?"

"Would you like me to tell you what I was thinking?"

"Assuredly, yes."

"Well, the idea came to my mind, along with another of no moment, that perhaps Mr. Dursey is playing a ruse—that this denial is only a trick to create a doubt as to his identity."

"You think so?"

"I don't say that I think so; that was the idea that struck me."

"Well, that is decidedly more reasonable than to think there can be two men so nearly alike that they cannot be told apart. And yet—"

"And yet what, madam?"

"Pardon me, it was only a thought."

"Do you think this is true?" inquired Myra.

"Is it not the more reasonable of the two?"

"But, why would he deceive you?"

"Why? Would he not think that I would be the first to hang him if it were proven to my satisfaction that he did do the deed?"

Myra looked amazed for a moment, but something in the eyes of the other made her understand that it was only a cue she was to follow, and she quickly came to the support.

"Why, true enough, he could hope for no mercy from us."

"Positively not. And yet, he assures us that he is innocent—we believe that he is, and there must be some terrible proof that he is afraid will come to light and tell against him."

"It may be so."

"And hence this trick," said the lawyer.

"Yes, yes, now I begin to see it, Mr. Dougherty. If arrested again, the people would not dare to hang him for fear of making a mistake."

"That, I say, may be his game; and yet, on the other hand, that is only my idea, and if this letter is true, then who can be the other man? That is the latest enigma for us to solve."

"True, indeed, who can he be?"

"It must be as Mr. Dougherty has suggested," said Myra. "The gentleman must be playing a role with a purpose."

"Yes, yes, truly that must be it," agreed Mrs. Kenton. "There is no other way to explain it. And yet, what are we to think about Mr. Hawkins's stand in the matter?"

"And what about this letter, ladies?" asked the lawyer.

"What about it?" asked Marie.

"Would he desire those who believe him innocent to be kept in the dark? Taking the letter just as it reads, there is hardly room to doubt what the writer says. Do you know, the more I think of it the more I believe there must be another Kid-Glove Kris."

"It is confusing to think of such a possibility," mused Mrs. Kenton.

"No, it must be as you have said, sir."

So Myra insisted.

"Well, it is not easy to determine," said Mr. Dougherty, taking up his hat and rising. "There is but one thing for me to do, take the letter at its word, so to say, and do as requested."

"Yes, you must do that," agreed Mrs. Kenton. "If the man is innocent, as he so strongly asserts and as we already believe, he must be at work trying to establish his innocence, and this is one move in his plan, whether the other part of his letter is strictly true or not."

"Yes, yes, I think so, I think so," moving toward the door with backward strides, and a bow at each stride. "Your pardon for my overstaying a proper time, ladies. I humbly apologize for having inflicted you for so long with my poor presence." And thus he bowed himself out of the room, while they responded to his words, and closed the door. And then he descended the stairs, rubbing his nose with thumb and forefinger.

CHAPTER XVII.

ANOTHER LETTER AND FURTHER DOUBTS.

No sooner had the door closed, than the two women looked at each other.

It was a keen, searching look on the part of each, as if each would read the innermost thoughts of the other.

"What can it mean?" queried Myra.

"It means that there is more mystery than ever, dear," was the reply.

"Then you think—"

"The letter is true, in every particular. There is another man here who looks very like Mr. Dursey."

"Then Mr. Dougherty—"

"It was well enough to leave his mind confused in the matter. We did not want to enlighten him respecting our private thoughts, you know. The great question is—"

"What?"

"What are we to do in the matter?"

"Why, what can we do? We have not been taken into his confidence, and can do nothing."

"But we have been assured of his innocence, and that, as much as anything, was the purpose of his letter. He knew whom it would reach—that is, all who have faith in him."

"If so, the more reasonable that the first part was to deceive, don't you think so? But, you have assured me otherwise. Talk about Mr. Dougherty's mind being confused; it is enough to confuse anybody. If there really are two, how are we to know the one from the other?"

"There can be but one, rest assured of that. Such remarkable resemblances are found only in story books, my dear."

"Well, I am willing to be convinced, but how about Mr. Hawkins?"

"Oh! he is contrary, anyhow. If you were to say the sun was red, he would be sure to say it was green."

"If that is the case, then his evidence is hardly to be taken into account at all, I should say. But, even looking at it as we do, what can be the hidden purpose of it all?"

This carried them back again to the starting point, and they covered the ground again and again during their conversation, being no nearer a solution when they ended than they had been at the beginning. There was one great question—if Kid-Glove Kris had a double, who was it?

But, we must follow Lawyer Dougherty.

When he left the hotel he went straight to the office of the mayor.

Grimes and Hawkins had just come from the jail, and had entered only a few minutes before.

The mayor was pacing the floor, his face dark and troubled, while Nate Hawkins was sitting on a chair with his heels on the desk, looking "as happy as a clam."

Grimes looked up suddenly as Dougherty entered.

"Here, Dougherty, maybe you can settle this," he cried, shoving a letter at the lawyer. "Did you ever see that writing before?"

"Don't think I ever did, sir," said the lawyer, at first glance.

"Look at it closer. Read it, in fact."

The lawyer read as follows:

"Mayor Grimes:—

"I would like to impress upon your mind, if I can, the fact that the man you had in your jail was not the sport called Kid-Glove Kris. I am that prisoner, but I am not he. Since my word will not be taken in the matter, however, and since my neck is in danger at your hands, I must remain under cover until the mystery has been cleared. As you have had a taste of my quality, I will simply sign myself as—

"HARD-HITTER HUGH."

"Why, this is passing strange," mused the lawyer, when he had read to the end.

"What do you see strange about it?"

"Wait. You asked about the writing. No, I don't recognize it. Do not think I ever saw it before."

"The deuce you don't!"

"I don't."

"Isn't it Kid-Glove Kris's?"

"No, I should say not, decidedly. Not at all like it."

"What did I tell ye?" spoke up the ex-mayor, more smiling than ever, if possible.

"Wait," waived the mayor. "Not at all like it, you say, Dougherty. Very good; that is just the point I am coming at. Isn't this Dursey's writing in disguise?"

"I would say not, mayor."

"What the deuce makes you think it ain't?"

"Why, sir, because there is not a scrawl in it at all like his."

"Ah! now I have you. Are you listening, Nate? What would the sport do if he wanted to disguise his hand?"

"Why, try it, of course, I suppose."

"Just so, and he is no fool, this same Kid-Glove Kris. He has done it so well that not one of us recognizes his fist. But, he has overdone it, and that is just what gives it away!"

"Stubborn as ever, ye see, Dougherty," said Hawkins. "Bound ter have his own way about et."

"Well, Mr. Grimes, look at this," said the lawyer.

He handed the mayor the letter he had found in his office, and which he had just shown to the ladies.

The mayor's face clouded again as he took it, and a glance at the writing and at the signature caused him to voice an oath. There was no mistaking this writing.

"Where did you get it?" he thundered, when he had read it.

"On the floor of my office, sir."

"What is et?" demanded Hawkins, interested immediately.

"A letter from Kid-Glove Kris to Dougherty here," answered the mayor. And he read it.

"Thar, now ye are talkin'," cried Nate. "That has the genuine ring about it, that one does. That is Kris, sure enough, et is."

"And you claim that this other isn't his."

"That's what I do."

"Well, you are a fool, then, that's all. Here is all the proof in the world of it, now."

"What is et?"

"Are you so blind that you won't see?"

"Mayor, I'd git mad if et was wuth while, but et ain't. I ain't so stubborn that I won't see, that's sartin. But, go on."

"Yes, I am stubborn when I am sure that I am right, you are right I am. But, for the proof: Here are two letters written the same day, and left in the same manner. What more proof do you want?"

Hawkins looked serious.

"Thar is a p'int, sure enough," he had to admit. "But, I must stick to my first idea, for I seldom go wrong when I cling to first impressions. Thar is only one way to settle the whole business, and that is ter git holt of both fellers at once and make 'em explain."

"Both at once—Confound it! ther is only one!"

"Thar's two."

"So I thought," put in the lawyer, for the sake of peace in the family, "but I am forced to change my mind now."

"Ha! then you agree with me?" asked Grimes.

"All the evidence is on your side, sir."

"And some of the boss sense on mine," said Hawkins.

"See here," the lawyer called attention, holding the two letters up side by side.

"Do you notice anything striking?"

"Ther difference," said Nate.

"Yes, but something more."

"What is it?" demanded the mayor.

"The paper. Don't you see the letters have been written on two halves of the same sheet? The tear proves it."

"Right, by thunder!" cried the mayor.

"Where are you now, Nate Hawkins? It was a clever trick, Kid-Glove Kris, but you didn't do it quite clever enough. I

guess we will know ye next time you come this way—By great, I think we will, anyhow!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

NEW-COMERS APPEAR.

At that moment the doorway darkened.

All three looked up, there to find two strangers—men they had never seen before.

The subject of conversation was dropped, and as a matter of fact Nate Hawkins was less smiling than when it had begun.

He had been led to see that nearly all the evidence in the case was against his pet theory, yet he was firmly convinced in his own mind that he was right.

But the two strangers.

They were roughly clad, stalwart fellows of about the same size and build.

Both were bearded, and there was something of a sameness about their looks that struck the observer at once. Their clothes were different, and their beards were not alike.

"Can you tell us whar we wull find Thomas Kenton?" one asked.

"Tom Kenton, the mine-owner?"

"That's him."

"Well, we don't happen to have his latest address," said the mayor facetiously. "You must be strangers here."

"Yes, so we are."

"Where do you hail from?"

"New Mex. We used ter work fer Tom Kenton in his Bud o' Beauty Mine, down thar."

"I see. Well, I am sorry to inform you that Tom Kenton is dead."

"Tom Kenton dead!"

So they both exclaimed, and they looked at each other with the greatest surprise and consternation.

"You can't mean it," said the spokesman for the pair. "But that ain't sayin' et ain't so; et takes us sorter off our feet, as et wur, comin' so sudden. When did he die?"

"About a month ago, a little more or less."

"What was ther matter?"

"He was murdered."

"Murdered!"

Their faces, travel-grimed as they were, showed their hearts' dismay at the information.

"Yes," said the mayor, calmly.

The other two men were simply looking on and listening.

"And has ther cuss been hanged what done et?" now spoke up the other of the pair.

"No, he hasn't been caught yet," said the mayor. "Or, rather," he made haste to correct, "he has been in our hands a couple of times but has got away both times."

Hawkins said nothing.

"Ha! then ye know him, do ye? What's his name? I reckon he will fare hard ef me and my pard gits holt of him; hey, Joe?"

"Well, you kin bet your life on et," agreed the other, grimly.

"He is known as Kid-Glove Kris, a sport," the mayor explained. "He escaped jail here only last night, and he is somewhere around in hiding, we are quite sure of that. But, who are you?"

"Us?"

"Certainly; think I am talking about somebody else?"

"Didn't know whether ye meant me singly and only, or my pard throwed in. Et don't matter—"

"I mean both of you."

"Jist what I was goin' to say, it don't matter, fer I can take et the last way and tell ye in a lump. We are Ben and Joe Gibson—I'm Ber and he is Joe. Mebbe you've heard Mr. Kenton speak of us."

"No, I never did."

"Well, not likely, that's so. But, pore Kenton, to think that he had ter die that way! What was et done for?"

"Now you are going too much into particulars, my man. Nobody knows, to a certainty, what it was done for. But, have

you just come to town, that you had not heard a word about it?"

"Jist tramped in, sir."

"Well, you won't be long finding out all that is known here in Hard Pan. Nothing else is being talked of to-day. You say you worked for Kenton?"

"Yes."

"And that is what has brought you up here, I take it. Is that the case, my man?"

"You hit et right on the head, sir. We writ to him, much as three months ago, and he told us to come on and he'd set us to doin' somethin'."

"Well, it is rough on you, but you have got the facts."

The mayor turned away.

"Much 'bliged to ye," said the spokesman, as he and his brother moved toward the door. But he stopped.

"By ther way, sir," turning back again.

"Well, what is it?"

"Is thar a family livin' here named Blow?"

"You mean Billy Blow? That is to say, Susan Brown-Blow—for she wears the breeches."

"That's the name. A feller I knowed, that used ter work here, name of Simon Grudge, he boarded thar himself and put us onto the place. Where does the family live?"

"You knew Simon Grudge, eh?"

"Wull, ruther."

"And where is he? He was a hard nut to crack."

"Pore feller, he is dead. But, that house? Ef you will jist put us on trail fer et, we won't bother ye any longer."

"Yes, I'll do that, certainly," and the mayor gave the location of the Blow domicile, the two strangers paying attention while he was telling them how to find it.

"Much 'bliged to ye," said the one who had done the talking, and they made another start, this time effectually.

"A couple of disappointed chaps," the mayor observed.

"Very truly," agreed Dougherty.

"And I think I'll scrape their acquaintance a bit," said Nate Hawkins, getting up from his chair. "I used to pard with Simon Grudge quite a little, and I'd like ter know somethin' more about his take-off."

"All right, Nate, we'll excuse you," said the mayor, laughing. "But, are you ready to cave and acknowledge being downed?"

"On what?"

"That there is but one man, and that one is Kid-Glove Kris."

"Well, you have got me on the hip, mayor. Don't see how I kin help myself, as it stands at present."

"I thought you would be convinced of the error of your way, finally. All in good part, you know; I'll want to talk with you again, later on. There are some things I don't understand yet."

"All right, I'm willin', Pete."

"One thing, how Kid-Glove Kris got out of Devil's Inkhorn?"

"I give et up, mayor. We'll talk et over later on. We won't agree on et, anyhow."

"No, not at all likely that we will. No matter, go on after those fellows, or they will be out of your reach."

With a light laugh and a wave of the hand, feeling good over having gained a point over the ex-mayor, Grimes bade adieu to Hawkins and turned to talk further with Dougherty.

Hawkins hastened out, and caught sight of the two fellows, some distance down the street. He hurried after them, and when they were about half-way to their destination, came up with them, when he forced his way in between them, saying in low tone:

"Don't git crazy, now, when I ask ye, but which one of you galoots is Kid-Glove Kris?"

And their looks had been by no means friendly at the first blush, as they turned their eyes upon him.

The flash in one pair of eyes immediately softened, however, and the other man gave a slight start on hearing the question that was so abruptly asked of them.

The words, as said, had been spoken in low tone, and no one save the two men addressed could hear.

"Are you crazy, sir?" demanded the one who had denominated himself Ben.

"No, I guess not," was the laconic response.

"And you don't appear to be a fool. What do you mean by such a question as you have asked, my friend?"

"Why, I meant jist what my words meant, on course. But, ye needn't answer et now, onless ye want to. This hyar closter squint in a stronger light is all I needed."

"Then you have given it away, Nate?"

"Not any, pard."

"What did you say to Pete, when you set out to follow us?"

"Why, that I wanted to see you fellers to inquire funder about Simon Grudge. He was my pard, you know."

"Yes, I know. That was well done. But is my disguise so poor that it was so easily penetrated? If so, we might as well give it up before we begin," speaking to his companion.

"I think so," said he.

"Don't git crazy, same as I said before," admonished Hawkins. "Your make-up is all right, old pard. Not one in a thousand would see through it. Ef you could fool Pete Grimes, then you kin fool the old feller himself, by mighty ye kin!"

"Then how did you see through it?"

"Ther same as I seen that this other gent wasn't you, when he was brought in last night. You hadn't a closter pard hyer at Hard Pan, 'n what I was, Kid-Glove Kris."

"Well, that's so, I guess."

"An' I knowed them 'ar eyes of your'n. This other gent's is like 'em, but thar is a fine difference after all that couldn't fool me."

"Then you think we are safe in the role we have assumed, do you?"

"Will ye let me back ye up?"

"That is what I want you to do, now that you are on to our game."

"Then you are safe, sure enough, fer ef I take ye fer strangers, nobody else will be likely to question et."

"You are right. The fact of the business is, we intended taking you in with us as soon as we had got established here, and all secure in our characters."

"Ye don't say!"

"Yes."

"Ye do me proud, honest ye do."

"That is all right, Nate; I know the kind of man you are."

"And who is yer pard?"

"You can call him Hard-Hitter Hugh—not his real name, but that does not matter."

"Don't matter a mite to me, though I take et he must be a twin brother o' your'n. No matter about that; he is a hard-hitter, sure enough. Glory! ye had orter seen the way he pased Pete."

"He told me about it."

"Et was good, I tell ye. I'd 'a' had ter laff, ef Pete had shot me dead on ther spot fer et."

They all laughed.

Having now passed out of the main street and away from the crowd, they stopped to continue their talk.

"Well, Nate, what is the lay of the land here?" asked Kid-Glove Kris, or otherwise "Ben Gibson," as he had made himself known. "You know the inside of it all, of course."

"Thar ain't no lay to et," was the response to the question. "Et is all one darn whirl of mystery. I am the only feller hyer that knows anything of a sartainty, and what I know wouldn't

hurt your eye ef et was in et in the shape of a bowlder."

"What do you know, however?"

"Simply what I have got on to respectin' you and this gent."

"That is all, eh?"

"Yes."

"The two letters have been found, I take it."

"Yes, and Pete is sure, now, that there ain't but one of ye, and that you are the one."

"Then he thinks—"

"That it is some game you are up to. Ef he gits holt of either one of ye he won't let go, you bet."

"That is the way it looks, true enough. But, we must take care that he does not get hold of either of us, if possible to prevent. And if he should—"

"What?" asked Detective Dave.

"We must rely upon our friend here to help us."

"And I'll do it, to the last notch," Nate heartily declared. "You kin rely on Nate Hawkins."

"We shall have to take care not to be overheard," reminded Kid-Glove Kris. "If any one comes this way, let us be talking about Simon Grudge, for a blind."

"Sartain," said Nate. "But, pard, about that murder—what do you know about et?"

"Not a thing," declared the sport.

"I know you are innocent, but thar is the mystery of your goin' away that night, and all that."

"You have full confidence in me, then?"

"Ther fullest kind."

"That is enough. I will tell you the story as soon as we have a little more time. We have got to see Susan Brown-Blow, now, and arrange for board in her shebang."

"What do you want to go thar for?"

"Because, we want a place where we can come and go at will, and that ground-floor room of hers will just suit. It is the only place in the camp that I could fix on for our purpose, and maybe we can make use of the woman and Billy to some end."

"You mought Billy, but as fer Susan—"

A shake of the head.

"Well, there is where we are going, anyhow, just for the sake of that independent room of hers, and you must run in after we get established, and we will have a chat and arrange plans. As I tell you, it was my intention to see you and let you into our game, for we will want a friend at court, as it were, if anything miscarries."

"But what do you intend to do?"

"First, solve the mystery of that murder—"

"You mean Kenton's?"

"Yes. And then that other."

"The detective's?"

"Yes."

"All right, that is a game that I want to be in, so you can count on me fer all I weigh. But, thar is one mystery that I want cleared up right now, if you will answer a question."

"What is it?"

"How did this man git out of jail?"

They both smiled, and Detective Dave made the response.

"Why, your friend here came to my rescue," he explained. "He let me out."

"I thought so, and now hyer's the p'int: Whar was Gil Johnson when you was doin' that, Kid-Glove Kris? Was he in et, or not?"

"He was not in it. But, I don't want to get Gil into trouble."

"Yer won't."

"Well, he was lured away by a woman—I was not quite near enough to see who it was, but I guessed. That does not matter. I tell you this simply to show you that we trust you fully."

Some men coming that way just then, a few remarks were made for their especial benefit, concerning Simon Grudge, and Hawkins took leave of the pards as

CHAPTER XIX.

NATE HAWKINS SURE.

Both the men had already turned their faces toward Hawkins,

if they were indeed strangers to him, and they went on their way to see Mrs. Blow. How they made out we have heard from that emancipated lady herself.

CHAPTER XX.

ANOTHER COMEDY CHAPTER.

Kris and Dave kept close to their room all the afternoon.

About six o'clock Mrs. Brown-Blow came to announce that the evening meal was ready.

"Supper is ready," she said briefly. "And which one of you will take poor Simon Grudge's place at the board, see-in' that he was a friend of you both? I will fix the other matter."

"Let it come just as it happens," said Kid-Glove Kris. "But, what other matter do you refer to, Mrs. Brown-Blow?"

"Why, a place for the other one of ye, of course."

"Oh! I see."

"You see, by takin' you two I have rather overloaded my house and table, as it were."

"Yes, yes, I see."

"There was only one vacant place, and that was Grudge's, but I can fix the other. Bill Blow has got to wait, that is all there is about it, and he can make up his mind to it."

"That is too bad; maybe room can be made—"

"Not a bit of room, Mr. Gibson, not a bit of room. I won't have them that pays crowded by them that don't."

She led the way to the dining-room while they were thus speaking, and it so happened that Ben Gibson sat in the place that had always been held by the erstwhile master of the house, while Joe took that made vacant by the departure of Simon Grudge.

The meal was well under way when home came Billy Blow.

Mrs. Brown-Blow sat at the head of the table. She looked up as Billy came in, and motioned for him to go out.

"That's all right, Mrs. Brown-Blow, all right," said Billy, making for his accustomed place at the board. "Don't mind me, my dear, don't mind me at all. I kin wait on m'self."

He had just enough of the so-called "tangle-foot" aboard to make him limber at the knees, but he could walk tolerably straight.

By the time he had ended what he was saying, he reached his seat.

There he stopped short.

"Hillo!" he exclaimed, finding his place pre-empted. "Reckon you have got into the wrong pew by mistake, pard. Jist move along, will ye, and let me have my reg'lar place at this hyer feed trough. That's all right, m'dear; no need to git up on my account."

"You Bill Blow!"

She stood up and glared at her life-partner.

"That's me," said Billy, stepping back a pace and looking at her in a blank way.

"Yes, I know it's you, you good-for-nothing! This gentleman is my new boarder, or one of them, and that is his place. Do you understand? That is his place, and you are to wait."

"Um!" Mr. Blow exclaimed reflectively, stepping back and rubbing his chin. "I had fergotten yer new boarders, m'dear. Had clean fergotten 'em, on me word. Had fergotten that I have to sleep in the out-shed, now, as you said. What am I comin' to, anyhow?"

Kris and Dave were amused, and all the rest interested.

"That will do, that will do," said Mrs. Brown-Blow, trying to wave him to silence. "If you are in a hurry, go out in the kitchen and ask Chop to fix you a place there, and eat your supper with him—"

"Eat with a yaller Chineer!" cried Billy, with more of spirit than he had

shown in a year. "Eat in the kitchen with a yaller Chineer? Wull, I ruther guess not, Mrs. Brown-Blow, not if I know whar I'm at, and I think I do. What do you take me fur, anyhow?"

"There, there, William, do not excite yourself; this is no place for a scene; remember that you are in the presence of a lady, at least."

"A lady! Whur is she?"

"Here, I, your wife. Would you in—"

"I beg yer pardon," with a sweeping bow, throwing out both arms in a comical manner as he made it. "I thought you was a new woman."

"So I am, thank heaven!" He had touched her on her tender spot. "So I am, but none the less a lady, I should hope. Pardon me, gentlemen," to her new boarders, "but you can see I am forced to defend my position."

"Quite right, madam," said Kid-Glove Kris.

"Perfectly right, m'dear," Billy repeated. "You are one of the newest critters in this hyer gulch, I think anybody will allow that. You have got altogether too bran' new fer me, I have ter admit."

"Yes, gentlemen," taking advantage of the opportunity given to air her hobby, "I am a woman, freed from centuries of bondage, a woman emancipated. We claim that we are man's equal, and we refuse longer to occupy a position second to him. Nevertheless, we are women still."

"I deny that last," piped up Billy, who had backed away toward the door.

"You deny that I am a woman! Why, you wretch, what would you call me, if not a woman? I am a woman, and proud of being such, under the new conditions. What do you mean?"

"Didn't say so, m'dear, didn't say so," said Billy.

"You didn't say so?"

"No, didn't say you wasn't a woman; didn't say nothin' of the kind at all."

"What did you say, then, I would like to know? I leave it to these gentlemen if you didn't say that you denied my being a woman. Oh! you rum-addled wretch, you don't know what you do say!"

"Yes do, m'dear, yes do; but I didn't say that."

"Then what did you say?"

"You said you was a woman still, and I said you wasn't; that was all, that was all, m'dear."

"And what would you call that, I want to know? You are making a fool of yourself—for which you are not to be held accountable, since you can't help it. What would you call that?"

"You aire about the noisiest still woman that I ever—"

"You! Bill! Blow!"

She started as if to make a dash at him, but he waved her back.

"Don't git excited, m'dear, don't git excited," he said. "Keep calm, and you will live all the longer and die all the harder. Don't fergit that you are a new woman."

"Forget it, no!"

"And I reckon that I must be a specimen of ther new man, hey?"

"You are a brute, that is what you are! Gentlemen, can you imagine a woman like me marrying a thing like him?"

Some one had to respond.

"I presume he was altogether a different lookin' fellow, when you married him," said Detective Dave, almost forgetting his assumed character till he got a nudge from the sport. "Years bring changes, ye know."

"That is the point," said Mrs. Brown-Blow. "He was a different lookin' feller, entirely. But, of late, as I have risen, he has degenerated, till now there is a gapin' chazum between us that nothin' kin bridge across no more forever. I can never descend to his level, and he can never climb to the plane on which I stand to-day."

She was rehashing something she had read.

"That's so, that's so," Billy acquiesced, shaking his head. "Not only am I to sleep in the out-shed, but she would have me eat with a Chineer— By glory, Mrs. Brown-Blow, I draw the line at that last! You kin put me in the shed if you want to; you kin take ther head of ther table; you kin parade in breeches to yer heart's delight; but when you come to puttin' me down on a level of a blame Chineer cook, thar I draw the line! You are ridin' a high hoss, Mrs. Brown-Blow, but look out et don't buck, that's all. And be keerful not to tread on me any furder'n what you have done, or thar may be a new man around these hyer diggin's one of these days."

And having so delivered himself, Billy left the room, and the meal progressed to its finish.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHAT THE PARDS HEAR.

About the time the electric lights flashed forth for the night, and the camp took a new breath, as it were, and wakened up to the sport of the evening, the two pards strode forth to view the town.

It was all new to Detective Dave, save alone the jail—to which he had been introduced, and hence it was not necessary for him to play the role of stranger, as was the case with Kid-Glove Kris. It was an easy part, however, and one in which the sport had appeared before.

Naturally, they sauntered into the Metropolitan.

This was the great focal point of the young city of an evening, and every newcomer had to pay it one visit at least.

The sinner went there to find enjoyment suited to his taste, and the saint had to see it with his own eyes in order to picture it in all its iniquity and draw a moral therefrom.

The great room was beginning to be well filled when the detective pards entered.

They walked around, as strangers might.

With each other's help, and the advantage of a room, they had been enabled to improve upon their disguises until it would have puzzled even Nate Hawkins, had he not previously made the discovery, to guess their identity.

Very little attention was paid to them, save a casual glance now and then from some one, for strangers were numerous at Hard Pan, were coming and going constantly, and there was nothing about these two to claim more than passing notice from anybody. Their appearance was very ordinary and every-day-like.

Finally, they took seats at a table.

They were discussing the situation as it then stood, talking in low tones, when Mayor Grimes entered the place.

He took a table near where the two detective pards sat, and was soon joined there by Ed Sawyer, acting manager of the Wingate Mine, and by Bob Bowman and Gilbert Dougherty.

The mayor and the acting manager had entered into conversation immediately.

"Well, did you look into what I suggested?" asked Sawyer.

"Yes, and there was nothing in it."

"Then she wasn't out?"

"Not at all."

"And what has Gil to say about it?"

"He saw no woman, so he declares. You must have seen some one else."

"Well, maybe I did, but I could have taken oath to the person. If she wasn't out, though, of course that settles it."

"Well, she wasn't."

And then they were joined by Bowman and Dougherty, as said, and that matter was dropped.

The detective pards were leaning over their table toward each other, as if in earnest consultation or discussion, but

were really listening and taking in all that was said.

The mayor and his party did not speak in low tones, but out loud in a natural manner, since the subject was not a private one. It was the one topic of talk, almost, all over the place, and was being viewed from almost every possible standpoint.

"Well, Bob, what word?" asked the mayor, as they took seats.

"No word at all," was the reply.

"You are still puzzled?"

"Completely."

"You have talked with Johnson?"

"Yes, and can make nothing out of him. He sticks to his first story like grim death."

"And you are inclined to think it is true?"

"I would be, if it wasn't impossible."

"What is your private opinion, then?"

"Just what I told you, that he was away from his post. He had no key, and he would not have dared to be found asleep."

"Have you heard that there may have been a woman in the case?"

"No. Who?"

"Don't know, but it has been suggested that maybe that was what took him away from his post, and he makes a poor show at denying it."

"He didn't mention that to me."

"Not likely that he would. Do you know whether he is friendly with any woman of the camp to that extent or not? If we can get hold of her, maybe we can get at the truth."

"Don't know of one, mayor. But even so, what would that do toward solving the mystery of how the prisoner got out?"

"It would let us know when he got out, at least."

"And what good would that do?"

"Well, now you are leading off into the blind trails again. We have got to make a beginning somewhere, you know."

"Well, if it won't offend you, mayor, there is one thing that I would like to suggest to you. It is what I have been thinking about ever since it happened."

"Well, what is that? Out with it."

"It seems to me we are taking hold of the pan by the wrong handle, so to say. What does it matter how he got out, so long as he is out?"

"We want to find who helped him out."

"That is all right, but don't you think the quickest way to find out that will be to find the prisoner and put him back again, and make him tell? He is in town, accordin' to what Dougherty here has been telling me."

"He may be, and he may not. He has had ample time to go away again, or, for the matter of that, some one else may have left the letters where they were found. I tell you, Bob, it is one of the greatest riddles that I ever tackled in my life. If you think you can find Kid-Glove Kris, go ahead and find him and pocket the reward."

The deputy shrugged his shoulders at that.

"And, by the way, Bob," said the mayor, "there is one feature of this matter that has been overlooked, I think."

"What is that?"

"You had a key to that jail."

"Certainly; I always have, being the jailer."

"And you and Kid-Glove Kris were not by any means bad friends."

"Confound you! you wouldn't hint that I let him out, would ye?"

"Well, the thought never came to me till this minute. Somebody certainly did help him."

"By heavens, Pete Grimes, if you were not an older man than I am, I would knock you down for that! You might just as well accuse the sheriff himself of it."

"There, gentlemen, there, there," put in the lawyer, as peacemaker. "Nothing is to be gained by your falling out. Might as well say that the mayor did it, as the sheriff, with no proof against anybody. I would say let the whole matter drop."

"Yes, but I want it understood that I had no hand in it," growled the deputy.

"Well, well, I take your word, of course," said the mayor.

"That's all right, then."

"But you, Dougherty, what have you been able to learn? Has anything turned up regarding Kid-Glove Kris?"

"I have looked all the afternoon, mayor, and have not been able to sight anybody that looks at all like him. My opinion is that he is not in town, if he was here."

"That is what they all report."

"But I had a talk with Billy Blow regarding the two new boarders his wife has taken in, and he hasn't much love for them, somehow."

"But we have seen them ourselves. You don't suspect that they are in any way concerned in this mystery, do you? What does Billy have to say about them that leads you to this mention?"

"Why, it is his opinion that they are not what they seem. He is inclined to think that they are somehow concerned in the new woman movement, in which his wife has enlisted, and I wouldn't wonder if he kicked up a row. But, no matter about that; what I was going to say—Ah! why, here are the very gentlemen."

He had just espied Dave and Kris at the neighboring table.

CHAPTER XXII.

MAYOR GRIMES SUMMONED.

The pard detectives looked around, pretending to break off in their conversation, and Detective Dave asked:

"Did any one mention us?"

Dougherty had raised his voice, on recognizing them.

"We were just speaking about you, boys," said the mayor. "At any rate Mr. Dougherty here was about taking your names in vain."

"That so? Well, we are here to answer for ourselves," said Kid-Glove Kris, as he and Detective Dave swung their chairs around facing the other table. "What's on the carpet?"

"Didn't you hear what we were talking about?"

"Heard somebody say, 'Ah! why, here are the very gentlemen,' and naturally we looked up. Your friend thar was lookin' straight at us."

Mr. Dougherty was looking a little confused, as if he had gotten himself into a fix he did not know how to get out of. He was looking hard at the pards, as if to read them through.

"Yes, it seems that you have created a little jealousy, or something akin to it, on the part of the husband of your landlady," said Grimes, by way of explanation. "What have you been doing to make him think that you are a pair of woman's rights advocates?"

The pards laughed.

From what they had heard, they knew that Dougherty had been just on the point of saying something more when he espied them.

And now the mayor was trying to turn that aside and lead their thoughts into another channel. They were willing to be led, but that did not alter the fact of the matter in the least.

"Thar is nothin' in et," declared Kid-Glove Kris, playing the assumed part with great care. "His wife seems ter be chief of the wigwam, and she ousted him out of his place at the table, that's about all thar was of it. But, I don't blame him fer gittin' r'iled."

"Why, no, if that is the case."

"Not only that," spoke up Detective Dave, "but he has got to sleep in the out shed."

"Worse and worse. Don't won't the ex-mayor is kicking over the traces. Bar 1. for a wonder for interrupting you, boys. Go 1. for a wonder with your private chat—Oh! the matter, Na rather surpris happen, so ju

"What is et?" asked Kris.

"This is Mr. Sawyer, who is ay. as manager of the mines since Mr. walter was ca ton's death."

He introduced the brothers, B went on to say Joe Gibson, telling who they were with these by what had brought them to Hard couldn't fool whereupon Sawyer said, that it wind was th be impossible to give them worley are strat ep over et. every place was full.

This suited the two detectives, y, chatted on was not their desire to accept work, un hour their how. And, after some further tal, mayor and no moment to the progress of our s, Cosmopolit they left their table, sauntered ar, tell, what d the room for a few minutes, and ves. lot a thing, out.

"Well, what do you think?" as got onto me Dave.

"We have got to look out for then you th Dougherty," answered Kris. nd it, and th

"But, you thought you could sig when we him, didn't you?" e alone?"

"And now know that I can't."

"What do you suppose he was go tell me abo to say?" Well, I was

"You remember what they were tal was gettin ing about, of course." ll in, when

"Certainly."

"Well, my opinion is that he w kick the d going to say that he thought one of And that g was Kid-Glove Kris." Exactly.

"My own thought exactly, and m who et v have got to take that idea out of heet, and th head, the sooner the better. How are wllie recogn going to do it?" Yes."

"That remains to be seen."

They sauntered down the street, whissible for talking. a direction

The street was the scene of the pre' Nigh abe vious night repeated, and they seemed' But, you to observers, to be enjoying it to th' No, nary full. "But, it

Meanwhile, as soon as they had lef ep still a their places at the table, Grimes de'll get to manded of Dougherty what he had hac "I hope on the tip of his tongue at the time whenr with I he made the discovery that the men'llers fro were there. hey claim

"Why, I was going to say," said ee, sarta Dougherty, "that here are two strangers. "We ag of Kid-Glove Kris's build, and if he has here car a double at all, may it not be that theseg the que men are he and his double? I don't sayr "And it is so, of course; it is merely a thoughtI "Bah! that came to me." ffer—"

"Ha, ha! Why, no, it is impossible. We know who these fellows are; wee id-Glov have their history, almost. Besides, Kid- evil's l f his'n side-o There going c undre all b and sh glanci leave

They were still talking when Nate Hawkins came in.

He looked around for a moment, and espied them, marched straight over to their table.

"Seen anything of them Gibson boys?" he asked.

"Why, yes, they were here a spell ago," answered Grimes.

"Wanted to fall in with 'em, fer a further chat about Simon Grudge."

"Don't know where they went to; are around seeing the sights, I have no doubt."

"Wull, et ain't important. I'll fall in with 'em again. They aire a pair of right good fellers, my opine."

"Say, Nate."

"Wull?"

"Do you think they are just what they pretend to be?"

"Jist what they p'tend to be? Don't reckon I jist git on to what you mean, Pete."

"Well, that is what I mean, just what I say. Do you think they are just what they pretend to be, two brothers from New Mexico?"

"Why, yes, to be sure I do; and who says they ain't?"

The point was explained to him.

"You aire wrong, lawyer, dead

"Don't worry," the ex-mayor declared, emphatically. "Go on, for a wonder, you and I agree on that—Oh! the matter, Nate," remarked the rather surprised. "It does not happen, so just call that waiter over."

"Well, good enough, but it won't do to let Mr. Dougherty have the least ground for further suspicion, pard. We have got to be as wary as foxes, now."

"We can do it."

"Wull, what's on ther programme?" asked Hawkins.

"Why, myself and pard are going to separate and do some scouting on our own account."

"And what about me?"

"We want you to walk over to the house with us, so that you can say you saw us go home, if need be."

"All right."

So, they set out, and, talking and laughing in natural, jolly, good-fellowship fashion, now and anon referring to the defunct Simon Grudge, they made their way to Mrs. Brown-Blow's domicile.

There Nate said good-night to them, and they entered their room.

Nate returned to the busy thoroughfare.

Meantime, as Hawkins had correctly guessed, Peter Grimes had gone up to the suite of rooms occupied by Mrs. Kenton.

The summons had been from her. He knocked.

The door was opened by the widow, who smilingly invited him in, and Miss Kenton greeted him.

"Pray be seated, Mr. Grimes," said the fascinating woman, in her sweetest tone and manner. "I hope I have not incommoded you by sending for you? I am very sorry if I have."

"You have given me the greatest pleasure, instead," was the response, as the portly mayor took a chair. "You have only to command me, Mrs. Kenton, and I am ready to obey, no matter what else I may have on hand. First duty to beauty, is my motto."

The mayor was something of a beau, and he made the most of every opportunity that offered to say nice things to ladies.

The widow smiled the remark aside.

"In fact," she said, sitting down near him, "it was partly to please my dear Myra that I sent for you. We desire to consult with you, Mr. Grimes."

"Bless me, but you do me honor."

"Don't mention it, but rather let us apologize for troubling—"

"Tut-tut!"

"Well, I will tell you what we wanted to see you for, Mr. Grimes: We have been talking matters over carefully, and Myra is of my own opinion that it was not Mr. Dursey who killed my poor husband."

The mayor's brow clouded just a little. "I hope you are right," he said.

"Well, what do you thing about it?"

"I have got to believe him guilty until he proves himself innocent."

"You have already promised me that you would try to protect him against a mob, should he be taken."

"Yes, so I will."

"Well, will you not go a step further than that?"

"What do you mean?"

"I will tell you: As things are, Mr. Dursey is not free to act openly in his own defense—"

"His fault, Mrs. Kenton."

"Why?"

"Let him come forward like a man and prove up, and he will be as free as the air."

"Has it not occurred to you, mayor, that he may not be able to clear himself, at present, and yet may be entirely innocent, as we firmly believe he is?"

"No, it hadn't appeared to me in that light."

"What do you think of it?"

"I can't put much stock in it."

"You admit that it may be possible?"

"Yes, but not probable. If that had been the case, why wouldn't he have told me, instead of breaking jail as he did?"

"But, it was not he that was in jail—"

"Don't let us enter upon that argument, I beg. I would have to be ungallant enough to differ with you, Mrs. Kenton."

"Well, well, let it pass. Admitting that it was he, for sake of argument, you are openly no friend of his, and he could not know that you were to be trusted."

"He could have trusted Sheriff Rickey."

"But, his duty was to bring him to trial."

"That's so."

"Do you begin to see what I am coming at? May I now proceed?"

"A thousand pardons, Mrs. Kenton. Proceed, certainly, and if there is anything that I can do—"

"Oh! thank you, mayor!" leaning nearer toward him and almost dazzling him with her bright eyes. "There is something you can do, and we both join in asking the favor. Is it not so, Myra?"

"Yes," said Myra.

"And what is it?" the mayor urged.

"It is this: You can, if you will, assure Kid-Glove Kris of your protection, and let him come here and do what he can to work out the mystery—"

"But, others would arrest him—"

"No, no, he would not come openly; let him be in disguise, and the fact that he would accept your offer ought to assure you of his innocence. He is nothing to me, of course; I am taking this step in mere justice to one whom I believe to be innocent."

"Is that strictly true, Mrs. Kenton?"

He looked at her keenly.

"Certainly it is true. I would do the same for you—even more, or for any one else in the same situation."

"But, how am I to find Kid-Glove Kris?"

"Would not a line in the papers reach him?"

"True, true, never thought of that. Would it be a great favor if I were to do this, Mrs. Kenton?"

"It would, indeed. I believe that Kid-Glove Kris, working to prove his own innocence, could in a short time bring to justice the actual murderer of my husband."

"Well, I'll do it."

"Oh! how can we thank you? I'll not forget it, Mr. Grimes," with another flash of her eyes.

"I'll remind you of that, some time," said Grimes. "This is taking a risk that I don't like, and putting myself in a bad boat, but I'll do it for you."

"You will not regret it, I give you my promise. And, if you can bring it about, how would it do for you to appoint an interview with him here in my rooms? There would not be the slightest chance for discovery, you know."

"Very good, I'll do it."

"And here, you know, he might be willing to tell the whole matter, so far as known to him."

The plan was further arranged, and the mayor took leave, the woman going to the door with him and giving him her hand, allowing it to rest in his own for a few moments.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WINNING GRIMES OVER.

"Wull, I wonder what now?" Hawkins asked himself, as he looked at the door that had just closed behind the mayor.

He stood looking for a moment, while he thought. Then he turned and passed out of the room, and went down the street to a place where he had an appointment.

"I guess I have et," he said to himself. "That dashin' widder has sent fer him, on business, and that's what made him go so quick and what took him into the house part of the hotel. Yes, that was et, Pete. I kin see as far through a wall as next one."

So he went muttering to himself, till presently he came to a place where he entered.

Here he fell in with the brothers Gibson.

"Well, did you succeed?" asked Ben.

"What do ye see the matter?" Johnson demanded. "I'm all right, ain't I?"

"Yes, fur as I know, ye are; but what made ye think of shyin' off when ye seen me? I ain't gunnin' fur ye, Gil; you orter know that."

"Who shied?"

"You did."

"You only thought so."

"Mebby I only thought so the other time, too."

"What other time?"

"Oh! come, now, no use standin' off that way, old boy. I seen you and you seen me, and that's all thar is about et."

"You mean when that dog barked at ye?"

"Yes."

"Well, was I shyin' off from ye then, as you call it? What reason had I to run away from you, anyhow? As you said, you ain't a-gunnin' after me, and I know et."

"Shall I tell ye why?"

"If ye kin."

"You was out thar to meet somebody, but that dog let you on to me, and I skart you off."

"Ha! ha! Is that what you thought? Wull, ye was wrong, Nate, dead wrong that time. I wasn't out thar to meet nobody, and what harm if I had been? I don't want nobody doggin' after me."

"Then what was ye thar for?"

"You and me's good friends, old man, but that's none of your business, to say et perlite."

"Wull, mebbly you are right. We have got our opines about that. I am not goin' to quarrel with ye about et. But, wasn't you out thar at the same place last night when that man got away?"

Johnson started.

"Who told ye that?" he demanded.

"Nobody; I was only askin' ye, but ye needn't answer now."

"I ain't goin' to answer, Nate Hawkins. You and me's been good friends, as I said afore, but look out."

"Where are ye goin' now?"

"Straight home and to bunk. Goin' my way?"

"Yes, if you don't mind. Nothin' great goin' on to-night, I see."

So, they passed down the street, chatting as they went, and when they came to Johnson's shanty he said good-night and entered.

Nate went on down the street, till out of sight from the shanty, when he went around some other buildings and came out in a few minutes at a point where he could watch Johnson's shanty without being seen.

But, he was too late.

Gil had been lying in wait for him on the street, and had played him a clever trick.

He had entered his shanty and had closed and locked the door, as Nate could testify, but barely had Nate passed from sight when Johnson came out by a rear door.

Pausing a moment there in the shadows to look and listen, he hastened away from the spot.

If he had shaken off one shadower, however, there was another of whose presence he was not aware, who went after him like a shadow veritable.

Johnson went on, avoiding the light places, and was presently well out of the town and half way across the flats on the north side, where they stretched to the hills that inclosed the gulch.

The man who followed was Detective Dave.

When Johnson stopped, finally, it was near an old building that had been built for some purpose or other in time past, but had now fallen into disuse.

There he secreted himself on the side where the shadow was deepest, and where he could not be seen. Had his follower been Nate Hawkins, perhaps discovery would have been again the result.

But this time it was an expert at the business.

Detective Dave made a wide detour, taking care not to let his body come into relief against any light background, and in that way he finally came up to the old building unseen and unheard.

By long patience and careful listening and close observation, he located the exact position of his man, and by the same process further carried out, managed to get a position where he could see and hear all that might be said, when the other party arrived, and with no fear of discovery himself.

That some one was expected, he knew full well.

Otherwise, Gil Johnson would not be there; it stood to reason. And thus they waited.

It was a weary wait, and Johnson was far less patient than the man who watched him. He muttered an oath now and again, and complained at the fate that was robbing him of good sleep.

Once he said, half aloud:

"Confound her! she has got to pay extra for this waitin', when she does come."

At last, after a long and trying vigil, there came the sound of a chirping in the direction of the lights of the camp, and the waiting watchman answered it in like.

It was rejoined to, and a little later a dark form was seen coming in the direction of the old building.

As it came nearer it proved to be a woman.

A little distance off she stopped and chirped softly again, and when Johnson had answered, came swiftly on to the spot where he stood.

The detective's eyes had become so accustomed to the darkness that he was able to make out quite well what the woman was like, and he felt a keen disappointment, at first.

The person had the appearance of being a common woman, slouchily clad, but when she came close she threw back the shawl from her head, and the detective's disappointment was dispelled at once, for she was the opposite of what her outward appearance had indicated.

The woman was Mrs. Kenton.

"Are you alone?" she asked.

"Yes."

"You are sure?" looking well all around as she asked.

"Yes, I'm sure. I have been hours in this one spot, and not a soul has been near here."

"I am glad of that. I must pay you and get back again without delay. Here is your money," pressing something into his willing hand. "I only want to ask you how you did it?"

"What difference does et make how et was done, ma'm, so long as the man was let out, 'cordin' to 'greement?"

"Because it is a mystery, and I would like to know."

"That wasn't no part of the bargain, that I was to tell. I didn't say I would tell how I done et."

"No, but I want you to tell me. Here, here is ten dollars more for the information. What is a puzzle to everybody else is a puzzle to me as well, and I am curious."

She pressed the money upon him, and he took it and shoved it deep into his pocket, as he had done the first, saying:

"Wull, ef you must know, I'll tell ye: When I got back thar and opened the door, later on, blame my cats ef ther chap wasn't gone, hide and hair, and not a sign of him could I find anywhars!"

"Gone!"

"Exact."

"You are telling me the truth?"

"The whole truth, so help me God. So, I thought ther safest thing fer me to do was to git rid of the key and know nothin', and that's what I done."

"Then you were telling the truth, after all, and you have taken my money for nothing. But, no matter, your in-

tention was good enough to see honestly, so keep it."

"Yes, I intend to, ma'm."

"You are a man I know I can trust, Johnson. I may have other work for you to do, and I will pay you well."

"I'm your man, ma'm. But, I don't know whar Kid-Glove Kris is?"

"No, I do not, but I want to find him. Do you know where he is, Gil?"

"No, I don't know a thing about him. If I git on to him, though, I will know."

"Yes, do that, and you will be well paid. Woe to you if you betray me, though. You will wish that you never been born. I give you fair warning." And with that she turned and glided away.

CHAPTER XXV.

THRILLING SITUATION.

Gil Johnson looked after the woman until she had disappeared in the darkness.

"She's a high-stepper, hang me if she ain't," he then muttered. "I would mind bein' Kid-Glove Kris myself, to be loved by a woman like that. Well, I'll get the money, anyhow," and he clapped his pocket as he spoke, and started away.

His shadower had already gone, had even distanced the woman, in the direction of the hotel.

Taking position near where she must pass to reach the side door, Dave waited until she came along.

"Marie?" he then softly called.

The woman stopped short instantly.

"Marie?" he repeated. "Is that you?"

"Who are you?" in a low voice.

"Kris."

Instantly she ran toward him, and, the deep shadows of the great building threw her arms around his neck.

He, in the meantime, had removed his disguise, and it was Kid-Glove Kris, the woman believed, save alone that his moustache was missing.

The pard detectives had been obliged to dispense with their moustaches in order to perfect the disguises.

It was a delicate part for Detective Dave to play, but he embraced the woman, and did not hesitate to kiss her.

"Come! we must steal away from here," she whispered. "We might be seen. We will talk only a few minutes, for I must get back into the house before I am discovered."

"Where have you been?" asked Dave as they drew into a deeper shadow close to the house.

"To pay an honest debt for you."

"What was it?"

"I paid the man whom I engaged to get you out of the jail last night, when they had you downed."

"Then it was you set me free?"

"No, it was not I, but the man I employed for the purpose."

Briefly, then, she told him of her hiring Gil Johnson to liberate him from the jail, and pretend that he had been overpowered.

That had been the original programme.

The woman was more puzzled than she had been, and as Dave pretended not to be able to enlighten her, it left her in the dark entirely.

He told her all, that a man had entered the jail, had removed his handcuffs and set him free, but that he did not know who it was nor what the object.

"But," changing the subject, "you can surely clear yourself of the charge of murder, Kris."

"Unfortunately, I can't. All the circumstances are against me, as you know—or as I can tell you."

"But you are innocent, Kris—that is, I believe you are, and so does my husband's daughter. We are going to try to enable you to prove your innocence, if possible."

"What if I were to confess that I did the—"

"Sh! Some one might hear you. I know that you did not do it."

"How can you know it?"

"By my faith in you."

"What jury will believe that? They will ask for proof, and if it is not forthcoming, I must hang."

He felt the woman shudder as she leaned against him.

"No! no! We must save you, we are going to save you," she said rapidly. Listen to what I have to say; then you must lend yourself to the scheme.

"I have seen Pete Grimes, and have made him promise to give you a fair show to clear yourself. He will try to find you, by a line in the papers, and you must let him know where you are. Then you can come here, and he will aid you all he can."

"But he hates me, and would only like to get such a chance to deal me a blow."

"No, no, he will see you through, for my sake."

"Ah! then you—"

"I am playing my hand for all it is worth, Kris, and all for your sake. Let me save you, and that is all I ask."

"But I will not place myself in any such position as that, Marie."

"Don't refuse anything that can possibly serve you, Kris."

"But I must. Don't you see how it would be? Is it not true that Pete Grimes loves you?"

"I suppose he does, but, what do I care for that? He is afraid to let it be seen that he has any such feeling, for fear that he may get into trouble the same as you."

"I thought so."

"You thought so? Why, you knew it well enough."

Dave had spoken unguardedly, his own mind instead of words fitting the part he was playing.

"Then what do you purpose doing?"

"Go it alone," he said.

"But what can you hope to accomplish?"

"I mean to hunt down the man who killed your husband."

"No! no! You must not do that—you must not take the risk. Only save yourself, and let the rest remain as it is. Think of the danger you incur."

"No more than I am enjoying at present, if as much. I cannot clear myself, as I have told you, without putting the crime where it belongs. Don't you see it yourself?"

"Yes, yes, I see it. Oh! Kris! It was not you did it? I am not putting my trust in you blindly, am I? You need not fear to tell me the truth, no matter what it is."

"I have said enough to convince you that I am innocent," was the answer, "but if I cannot prove myself so, I might as well be guilty, so far as my fate is concerned. I must hunt down the murderer."

"And that we will do," said the woman, in a hard, determined tone. "He shall not escape us. But not another word to-night. We must part, for, to be seen here and thus, would tell terribly against us both." And throwing her arms around his neck once more, she kissed him and ran away.

CHAPTER XXVI.

PLAYING DOUBLE TRUMPS.

Detective Dave's thoughts and feelings would be hard to describe.

He stood where the woman had left him until he saw her enter the house; then he sauntered slowly from the spot.

"Well, what am I to think now?" he asked himself. "I was beginning to suspect her of the crime, or of having instigated it, but she wheeled suddenly and put it back upon me—that is, taking me to be Kid-Glove Kris. Can it be that he is the man, after all?"

No, it was impossible for him to believe that. He had been too frank in his dealings with the detective for that. And yet, if the woman was not quite sure of his innocence in spite of the assurance she had expressed, how could he hope to prove the contrary?

Detective Dave was puzzled, truly.

Meantime, Mrs. Kenton, entering the hotel, and proceeding straight to her room, had entered softly, as if to maintain secrecy, but found Myra up and pacing the floor in her night robe.

"Mercy! where have you been?" Myra exclaimed.

"Sh! do not speak aloud!" cautioned the woman, who closed the door and removed her rough shawl before offering any explanation.

"I have been playing the spy," she then declared, confidentially. "I thought you were asleep, or I would have taken you with me, if you would have dared to go."

"I was asleep," said Myra. "I awoke in something of a fright, for I thought I saw a man in the front room here, in the dim light, and when I called out to you and you did not answer I became alarmed. And then, when I ran to your room and found you were not there—"

"You thought you saw a man in the room?"

"Yes, so I thought."

"But you must have been mistaken."

"Yes, I suppose it must have been a shadow from the street, but at first sight it seemed real enough."

"It must have been a shadow. I locked the door when I went out you know. You heard me unlock it to come in. I think you must have been mistaken, dear."

"Yes, no doubt."

"Well, I have made a discovery."

"What is it?"

"I have discovered that there are, indeed, two men answering to the description of Kid-Glove Kris."

"How did you find that out?"

"By playing detective. It is not the first time I have done it, since your poor father was murdered, and it will not be the last, perhaps, for I am determined that his slayer shall not escape."

"Tell me, though, how you found out for certain that there are two men looking so nearly alike that they cannot be told apart?"

"Why, it is easy enough to explain. I met one whom I took to be the sport, and addressed him, but found out my mistake. I tell you we have got to be more than careful, Myra."

"But who is the other?"

"I do not know."

"Why did you not find out?"

"How could I do that? I would have had to reveal my own identity."

"I did not think of that. But now, what are we to think of the man? Is he friendly to the real Kid-Glove Kris or not?"

"That I do not know. But one thing is sure, Myra."

"And what is that?"

"That you will have to take more than care in order not to mistake the one for the other. After what you have confessed to me concerning your feelings towards Mr. Dursey, it would be awful for you to mistake this other man for him."

"But surely you could tell them apart now, Marie?"

"Barely possible, but you could not. Nor could I, perhaps, without some conversation."

"Then Mr. Hawkins was right."

"Yes, he was right."

"And you will tell Grimes so?"

"No! no! We will keep it to ourselves, for the present, dear."

"What is your object in doing that? I should think it would be the better to support Mr. Hawkins and make it known."

"Mr. Grimes would not be convinced easily, and it would only lead to inquiry as to what had taken me out to-night, and would do no good. It would undo the work I am trying to do."

"Then you have a suspicion who did kill poor papa?"

"No, not yet; but I am trying to find out by playing the shadow upon certain ones for certain reasons, which I cannot make known, not even to you. You trust me, do you not, dear?"

"I trust you, certainly. Why should I not trust you? Whatever you think is for the best, that we will do. We are working for one common end, and we are determined to reach it."

"Yes, no matter at what cost."

The words were spoken with considerable vehemence.

There was a ring to the voice that betokened a grim determination, and which the younger woman misinterpreted.

"Oh! I trust you fully," Myra assured. "I am only ashamed that I am too cowardly to take my share of the dangers with you. If Mr. Coleman had not been murdered—"

"There are other detectives to be had, dear."

"And I have been thinking about sending for another with little loss of time. Do you know, judging Mr. Coleman by his looks, I could not have placed full confidence in him, anyhow. I did not like his face."

"But you saw him dead."

"It does not matter; his face was his face, dead or alive."

"Well, I quite agree with you, though I would not have hurt your feelings by saying so. It was the face of a brute!" Vehement again.

"Oh! I would not have gone as far as that, Marie."

"And I do go that far; it was the face of a brute!"

Myra became immediately thoughtful, and for a few seconds was silent. Mrs. Kenton was watching her closely. Presently Myra looked up.

"I wonder if it can be possible, that this man was not David Coleman at all?" she queried.

"Not he!" the widow exclaimed.

"The thought just came to me," said Myra. "If it were not so improbable, I would be almost tempted to believe that such was the case."

"I do not see how you can for a moment doubt," returned Mrs. Kenton. "He had letters and papers in his pocket proving who he was, and you know that he was coming here secretly."

"Well, it was only a thought," observed Myra. "His face was such a disappointment."

Each sought her bed, each with widely different thoughts and emotions stirring mind and soul.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A WITNESS ON HAND.

Detective Dave walked on, head bowed in thought. It was one of the most baffling cases he had ever taken hold of, as well as the strangest experience of his life in the way of personal misadventures.

From his abstraction he was roused finally by voices near at hand, and he stopped short, right where he was in shadow.

They were men's voices, and were just around the corner of a building.

Going stealthily forward to investigate, he recognized the voice of the man then speaking as that of Mayor Grimes.

"I tell you he is guilty," he was urging, "and once we get hold of him he will never be able to prove his innocence."

"But he would have to have a fair trial," urged the other. "This is a civilized country, and we have got to make a show of dealing fair."

It was Dougherty who spoke.

"Yes, I know, but a very little evidence on top of the circumstantial evidence as it is, would down him."

"Then you want him downed?"

"See here, Dougherty; I believe he is the guilty man, and I don't want him to escape by any tom-foolery or juggling of the law. Just understand this—that I want Kid-Glove to have the fairest kind of a trial, and that I want him to hang, if guilty."

"Exactly."

"And you think that some slight additional proof of the right kind is all that is needed?"

"Almost any proof at all would finish the business for him, mayor; not a doubt about that."

"What you know and I know, we need not hesitate to talk about. We know that Mrs. Kenton wants that fellow found innocent."

"Well, yes, so she does."

"The fact of the business is, I have promised her to find him and give him the freedom of the town, letting him go about in disguise, with the idea that he may find the murderer."

"I see."

"That was a good stroke. But that is not to say that some smart fellow, yourself for instance, may not penetrate his disguise."

"Ah! I see, I see."

"And if that happens, of course I could not be responsible for it."

"Not at all."

"And, if the sheriff takes such good care of him that he cannot possibly escape, and the law steps in and finishes the matter, the woman cannot blame me. See?"

"Yes, I see."

"And you will have about a thousand dollars in pocket."

"Ah! now I begin to grasp the situation. There is not the slightest doubt of the man's guilt, in my mind."

"And I have no doubt but that you can make twelve other men think as you do, if you are on that side, nor that you can help losing in a losing game if you happen to be on the other."

"It looks that way. In fact, it is a plain case. He is guilty, and I must win if on the one side and lose if on the other. Is that all?"

"Not quite all," spoke another voice at that juncture, and a man stepped from around a corner of the building, confronting the pair, with a gun in hand.

Both men gave a start, and even Detective Dave was surprised. None of them had known that the man was there.

"Who are you?" demanded the mayor.

"Kid-Glove Kris, at your service!"

The man removed his disguise.

"That disguise, we will say right here, was not the same in which he had appeared as Ben Gibson."

Neither was the one in which Detective Dave had recently been working that of the assumed Joe Gibson. And, by the way, and as he was just reminded, he had not replaced the beard since his interview with Mrs. Kenton.

There was barely light enough for them to see.

"Well, what do you mean by appearing in this manner, interrupting a private conversation?" the mayor further demanded.

"I heard the remark made by Mr. Dougherty just now," answered the sport, "and I wanted to inform him that it will not be necessary for him to appear on either side, in the event of my arrest."

"Well, no matter what you heard, it would be hard for you to prove anything, even were it worth your while to try."

"How so?"

"We are two to one. I have been asked to do you a friendly turn, in case I happened to fall in with you before your arrest, and I am ready to do it if you are ready to accept it."

"Yes, I heard you saying something of the kind."

"Maybe you heard all that was said."

"Yes, I heard it all."

"Well, then, what have you to say about it?"

"I don't want to make any compromise of any kind. I am innocent, and am going to fight it out."

"But maybe you are not aware who it is that has taken this friendly interest in you, believing in your innocence in spite of all the appearances against you."

"I am in need of no aid. Give my respects to the lady, and tell her I am greatly obliged."

"Who said there was a lady in the matter? You are guilty, in spite of everything, but this was giving you a chance to get out of it if you can."

"I am no more guilty than you are, Pete Grimes! Suppose that you were to find yourself suddenly arrested and ac-

cused of the murder of Thomas Kenton, could you clear yourself?"

The mayor gave so violent a start that it was noticed even there in the dark.

"There would be no motive," he said quickly.

"Just as much as there would be in my case, sir," returned the sport.

In that instant Grimes threw himself upon the man so suddenly that Kris had no chance to raise his gun.

The lawyer lent a hand immediately, and between them they might have overcome the sport, but in almost the same moment the mayor felt the cold touch of a gun behind his ear, and a hand was inserted under his collar with a grip as of steel.

"Let up!" was the warning, in low but stern command. "Let up, or the worse for you! You have got the wrong man. I am Kid-Glove Kris! There was a witness to what was said, you see, and the best thing you two gentlemen can do is to make as little fuss as possible, I warn you!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

The lawyer was first to succumb. He let go his hold almost instantly, with the gasp: "A witness!"

"And a full-grown one, too, you bet!" from Detective Dave.

Dougherty understood all more fully than did the mayor, but, under pressure of the gun, he, too, relaxed his hold upon the sport.

The sport's gun was up and the two were covered!

"Now, what are you going to do about it?" was demanded by Kid-Glove Kris, the real.

"What do you mean, ruffians?" cried Grimes. "What do you mean, holding two gentlemen up at the point of your guns in this manner? Do you mean to rob us?"

"Sure enough!" cried the lawyer. "Shall I call for help, Mr. Grimes? These two fellows deserve the gallows. We must taken them prisoners somehow. They shall give an account of—"

"Suppose you stop your mill," suggested Kris, letting him smell of the tube of his gun.

"If you say so," the lawyer submitted, scarcely above a whisper.

"I do say so."

"If you speak out that way again," said Detective Dave to the mayor, "I'll be hanged if we don't run you in for the murderer of Kenton."

"For the murder of Thomas Kenton? Why, you did it yourself!"

"I know why you have been so determined not to accept my word that I am innocent."

This was carrying out their prearranged plan to confuse.

"Which one of you is Kid-Glove Kris, anyhow?" the mayor demanded of Grimes.

"I'm the man, sir!" from Dave.

"And a minute ago it was you," turning to Kris.

"Well, you see another claimant in the field now," Kris rejoined. "You will have to decide to suit yourself."

"The first one caught will be hanged, that is how it will be decided," growled the official.

"After this night's business you will get yourself in a box along with us, and may be left in it alone. That is, unless you can positively prove that you did not do the deed, as, perhaps, you did not," intimated Dave.

"I swear that I did not!"

"Well, so do we swear that we did not!"

"Then it is all a blank mystery to me," avowed the magistrate.

"You have no suspicions? What is your opinion of Mrs. Kenton?" asked Dave.

"You wouldn't suspect a woman of it, would you?" demanded Grimes.

"Anybody is liable to suspicion. I only

asked what was your opinion of the lady?"

"She is as innocent as an angel; that is my opinion of her."

"But, she may know who did it; she may suspect some one, but lack much the proof to place the crime on him."

"What makes you think that?"

"Because she seems so certain that Kid-Glove Kris is innocent."

"Blazes! Now it is the other one, you that is Kid-Glove Kris. But, if she did suspect any one, she would tell the authorities of it at once."

"Unless there was a reason why she could not do so."

"Nothing would keep her from telling if she had such a suspicion."

"Well, mayor, here is a proposition to you," now put in Kris the real; "if you will just let this matter take its own course, we will make no mention of the night's doings. If you don't—"

"What if I don't?"

"We'll be obliged to tell what we know."

"You are talking for your own protection, that is what you are coming at. And you are taking me foul, besides."

"How is that?"

"You know I am pledged to follow your tracks and give you half a chance to prove your innocence, if you will."

"You seemed to forget that a month ago, sir."

"I was beside myself, stung by the accusation you flung in my teeth."

"Well, do you accept?"

"I have to accept, or break my word with the woman who foolishly thinks you innocent."

"Very well, then; it is understood. We will say nothing about this little encounter—for the present, at any rate. We are willing to believe you innocent."

"It will be just as well to let the matter rest, for the present," remarked Lawyer Dougherty. "Nothing is to be gained by an exposure, and it might give the real culprit a chance to elude the grasp of the law altogether."

"Then you accept our statement that neither of us did the deed?" demanded Detective Dave.

"For the time being, yes."

"Enough said!" from Kid-Glove Kris. "Good-night to you, mayor, and to you, lawyer. Next time we meet I hope I will be under pleasanter circumstances."

And, with that, Kris and Dave backed away, and were soon lost to sight in the darkness.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE PARD'S DILEMMA.

The pard detectives went straight up the gulch.

"Well, what do you think now, pard?" the sport asked.

"It seems to get deeper at every step," Dave responded.

"Do you think the mayor had a hand in it?"

"Not at all."

"Then what do you think?"

"That he is afraid suspicion may fall on him. And I take it that he is in love with the widow, or has been hard smitten with her charms, and may have compromised himself further than would be good for the safety of his neck."

"Hardly a doubt of it," agreed Kris.

"Have you any doubt who can be the guilty person?" from Dave.

"No, I have not as yet."

"Will you answer a few blunt questions?"

"Certainly, David."

"Do you love Mrs. Kenton?"

"Phew! That is a blunt one, sure enough!" ejaculated Kris.

"Do not answer if you do not want to, but I would like to know."

"I will answer it. There must be no misunderstanding between us. Our dealings must be open and candid."

"I agree with you."

"Very well, then; I do not love Mrs. Kenton."

"That is one point settled. Have you been able to believe that she loves you?"

"Yes, I am sorry to say, I have. I am sure she does, though it is more her vault than mine. I avoided her when I found out the true state of affairs, as much as she would let me."

"Do you think it possible that she killed her husband out of love for you, in order to be free?"

"My God! No! What has put that horrible thought into your head?"

"I have had an interview with Mrs. Kenton."

"When?" in surprise.

"This night. She took me for you, and acted accordingly."

"Great Scott! And she let fall something that has made you suspect her of the crime?"

"Well, yes, at first."

"It is impossible. She is no angel, perhaps, but I cannot believe her vile enough to have done a thing like that, Coleman."

"No, nor do I, now. The fact of the business is, she was not sure that you did not do it, and I had to assure her on my honor—playing your role, you understand—that I did not do it."

"But things are coming to a desperate end here."

"You are right when you say that."

"When she acted in a way that gave her secret respecting her feelings toward me, eh?"

"Most decidedly. She may be innocent, as you say, and by her uncertainty respecting you, I am inclined to believe she must be; but, God help any one who might come between you and her, now!"

"Great heavens!" impressively.

"What is the matter now?"

Kris was silent for a moment; then he answered:

"And I must tell you, since nothing must be reserved, working toward a common end as we are."

"What was your thought, then?"

"I have to admit that I love Tom Kenton's daughter, the young girl who has just come here."

"You love Myra Kenton?"

"Yes; at first sight of her passion prang alive in my soul, and I must win her or die."

Dave's head dropped and he was silent.

"What is the matter?" Kris presently asked.

"I am honor bound to tell you," was his sad response.

"Good heavens! What is it?"

"I believe there is a similarity between us that is even deeper than the mere outward semblance, Kid-Glove Kris."

"What is it?"

"A similitude of soul—a something that I will not attempt to explain, for the reason that it would prove impossible. We have already seen that we have tastes in common."

"Yes, yes."

"Well, our affections have been destined to go out toward the same object—"

"Heavens! Do you mean to say—"

"That I, too, love Myra Kenton. My experience is yours repeated."

Both were silent, and thus they walked a considerable distance.

Kris was the first one to speak.

"It is fate," he said.

"I was honor bound to tell you," from Dave.

"Well, which shall it be, friendship or enmity between us, pard?"

"It is a matter in which only one can win, and if your feeling toward the lady is the same as mine—"

"And yours the same as mine—"

"Can we be friends?"

Again silence.

"Can we be foes, after our good beginning?" feelingly.

"On my part, no," avowed Dave. "You came in contact with the lady first, and for that reason you have a claim, the same as if it were a claim mine in question."

"And before that you had been in correspondence with her, and you came here as her agent. I have no right to step between you and her, and I am honor bound to take a back seat and see your happiness eventually perfected. Let it be that way, Coleman!"

"No; that is not fair to you. My relations with her were purely of a business nature—and still are, for that matter. But, here is a proposition."

"Name it, no matter what it may be; if it will let us out of this queer dilemma."

"Let us leave the matter entirely to fate or Providence, whichever may rule, and agree to abide by the decision of circumstances. If you can agree to that, here is my hand in honor."

"Agreed! And here is mine," returned Kris. "Let it be a fair and open contest between us, and the best man win. But, both may be a little premature, for the lady may be already out of the market, so to say, and neither of us might be able to win a smile from her, anyhow."

"That is true; and yet, here is a terrible thought which carries us back to the starting point of this strange business: What if something of this should become known to Mrs. Kenton, having the regard for you we know she has? What if she comes to know that you love Myra? It was that thought which struck you a while ago, and not an idle one, is it, either, pard Kris?"

"My God! It must not be known!" cried Kris. "It would place that girl's life in danger—I fear it, I know it!"

CHAPTER XXX.

AMAZING EVENT HAPPENS.

The following morning Hard Pan was thrown into a state of wildest excitement.

It was reported that Miss Kenton was missing from her room in the hotel, and nothing could be learned of her whereabouts.

Mrs. Kenton, of course, made the discovery. She arose a little later than usual, and made haste to the dining-room, where, as she said, she had expected to find Myra.

Seeing that she was not there, she immediately inquired of one of the waiters if Myra had breakfasted, and when informed that she had not been seen that morning, Mrs. Kenton became greatly troubled and hastened to the parlors to see if she was there.

She was not found.

"It is strange, very strange!" she said, returning to the dining-room, where several were still at breakfast. "I awoke a little later than usual, and as Myra was not in the room I concluded that she had come down to breakfast without waking me. The door was unlocked. Where can she be? Please start inquiry immediately."

The woman had no thought for her own breakfast, but hastened from one part of the house to another, asking every servant she met, but no one had seen the young lady.

Then the inquiry was pushed outside of the house.

With nothing but a loose "fascinator" over her head, the widow ran thither and thither, making inquiries of everybody she knew, but nowhere had Myra Kenton been seen.

Finally, Mrs. Kenton was about in despair. She was wringing her hands, and the look of distress on her face was pitiable.

By that time the whole camp had been aroused, and, as said, a state of wildest excitement prevailed. Where was Myra Kenton? What had taken her forth in that secret manner?

Mayor Grimes and Nate Hawkins were talking together near the steps of the piazza when the woman returned to the hotel.

"Oh! Mr. Grimes!" she cried, on coming up. "You have heard the awful

truth—that my dear Myra is missing and cannot be found? Can you not do something in the matter?"

"I have done everything possible, Mrs. Kenton," the mayor answered. "I have made men hustle around ever since I heard of it, but it seems that nothing is to be discovered. Have you no idea where the young lady has gone to?"

"No, no, I cannot imagine where she is, sir. I know that she retired to her bed when I retired to mine, and that is the last I saw of her."

"And you slept all night?"

"I do not remember waking up more than once."

"Was she in her room then?"

"I do not know. I did not go in to see. I did not think about her at all."

"What awakened you that once?"

"I do not know that anything awakened me; I simply woke up."

"And you did not lie awake long?"

"No."

"You heard nothing unusual?"

"No, no. I tell you it is altogether a puzzle to me. I am utterly at loss and almost distracted."

And truly she looked it.

"Et is durnation queer," commented Nate Hawkins, shaking his head. "Didn't leave a scrap of paper nor nothin' to say whar she was goin'?"

"Not a thing, sir, that I have been able to discover."

"You and she appeared to be on friendly terms," remarked the mayor.

"Why, we loved each other, Mr. Grimes!"

"Well, I don't know what to make of it."

"What am I to do?" the woman asked, wringing her hands.

"There is only one thing I can think of—that she must have gone away in her sleep."

"Good heavens! That is worse than all, for no telling what evil has befallen her!"

"You said the room was locked on the inside?"

"The room leading into the hall, yes."

"But one, you said, was unlocked."

"Yes, with the key in the lock on the inside, just as usually left."

"Which is proof that she left the room of her own free will. How will it do to offer a reward?"

"That must be done immediately, before harm comes to her, if it has not come already. Make it a thousand dollars, mayor, to any one who can discover her."

"I'll see to it at once, Mrs. Kenton."

The woman mounted the steps and entered the house, and Grimes and Nate Hawkins went in the direction of the mayor's office.

"Well, what are we to make of it, Nate?" Grimes asked.

"It gits thicker all the time," growled the other. "He was not feeling in the best mood. He had been greatly disappointed in the matter of the watch he had tried to keep upon Gil Johnson, the night before."

After standing for an age, as it seemed to him, feeling certain that Gil would come forth from his shanty sometime during the night, what had been his disgust to see the fellow enter instead of leave his domicile!

"Here is something entirely amazing," Grimes went on. "The murder of Tom Kenton was bad enough, but now comes this disappearance of his daughter on top of that. I don't like it."

"Nor any one else. I'm of opinion, mayor, that Kenton must have had a bitter enemy, who is bound to work evil to all that belonged to him."

"You may be right, but I don't see what good it would do him to harm the child, after he had made away with the father."

"Ha! There go those two fellows, now!"

"What fellows?"

"Those men who have just come here and are boarding at Blow's. I am

not as certain of their honest intent as you seem to be, Nate."

"But, here we are at the office. Say, have you seen anything of Dougherty?"

"Not this mornin'."

"I wish you would hustle around and find him and bring him here. He does my writing for me, you know, and I want to get that reward up immediately."

So, Hawkins set off to find the lawyer, but he had barely passed out of sight when Dougherty slipped into the office.

"There they go!" he said, pointing to the Gibson brothers, who were walking in the direction of the mines, talking together. "I feel certain of our suspicion now."

"Yes, so do I. But here is a matter for you to see to for me, and that done, we will seek an encounter with them and have them unmasked. Maybe they are at the bottom of all this."

CHAPTER XXXI.

NEW LIGHT THROWN OUT.

The Pard Detectives had just heard the news, but not knowing how to act at the first moment, they had strolled off in the direction of the mines.

"My God," said Kid-Glove Kris, "what can it mean, coming so suddenly? It cannot be that the woman has learned anything, and has had time to act upon the information?"

"No! no! That is impossible," protested Dave. "No one knew our secret save our two selves, and we have breathed it to no one save to each other. We must look further."

Kid-Glove Kris stopped short, laying a hand on the arm of his companion.

"What are we going out this way for?"

"I don't know; but we must go on, now. We can go as far as the mines, as we are heading in that direction."

"And we can there ask again concerning the prospect of work if we remain here awhile. That will serve to strengthen the hand we are playing, for we do not want to be discovered."

So they went on to the mine, where they inquired for Mr. Sawyer, and had some talk with him about work, and then set out to return to the camp proper.

Presently they observed Billy Blow coming toward them, and going in the direction of the mine, head down.

As he came near, what was their surprise when he spoke out, without lifting his head or his eyes, and addressed them in these words:

"Don't stop! Don't look at me! Don't pay no 'tention, nohow! but keep yer eyes peeled fer Dougherty and ther mayor. Nate Hawkins told me to say this to you. That's all, gents!"

"All right!" responded Dave. "You did that well, my man."

The camp bumper went on his way, and the pards continued down to the camp.

Striking the main street, they saw the mayor and the lawyer coming toward them.

As they drew near, the mayor stopped.

"Good morning, boys!" he greeted. "You have heard the news, I suppose? Where have you been?"

"Been up to the mines to see about work, if we stay around awhile and wait for et," answered Kid-Glove Kris. "What news do you mean?"

"Why, that Kenton's daughter has disappeared."

"Yes, we did hear something about that," spoke up Dave. "What has become of her?"

"That is the question. We have posted a reward of a thousand dollars, and if you have got plenty of idle time on your hands, take hold and see if you can't find her."

"Guess that ain't in our line, boss," intimated Kris. "All the same, we'd like to do it."

"Hillo! thar ye be, hey?"

It was Nate Hawkins approaching.

"Been lookin' all over fur ye, lawyer, to tell ye that Grimes wanted ye, and

hyer ye both be as big as life! Mornin', boys!"

On the coming of Nate, dark looks came over the faces of Grimes and the lawyer, and they cut their interview short and sauntered on in the direction of the mines.

Nate joined the pards, and all went in the opposite direction.

"Did ye see Billy Blow?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And he told ye?"

"Yes; but, what did you mean?"

"They are onto ye, deader'n Sioux Injun, that's what!"

"How can they be certain that their surmise is correct? They cannot prove it."

"What if they arrest ye and put ye in the cooler, and strip ye of yer disguises, wouldn't that tell the story plain enough?"

"But, they won't arrest us."

"How d'ye know they won't?"

"The mayor has a good reason for not poking too far into our business, now."

"But, all the same, he is going to poke till he finds out what he wants to know. That is, if he can, which may be some doubtful, if Billy plays well his part."

"He played it well enough when he met us."

"He ain't as big a fool as he looks."

"What is his part?"

Nate explained, and the pards enjoyed a laugh over the scheme.

"But, how did you get on to the fact that they suspected?" asked Dave.

"By keeping my top eye open," answered Nate. "When Pete sent me to look for Dougherty, I s'pected somethin', and I stole back and heard enough to convince me that they meant ye no good."

"Well, no matter. We have little to fear from the mayor, and the less if Billy Blow can get in his fine work. There is something of far more importance to look after just now."

"And what is that?"

"The missing young woman. Have you any explanation to offer respecting her disappearance?"

"Nary. It is all a puzzle, unless—" and he hesitated.

"Unless what?"

"Et ain't worth while to mention it, fer et won't stand alone, et is so weak."

"No matter, let us hear what it is."

"Wull, et jist popped into my head that, mebbey, the same one that killed her father has got in his fine work on her, with some dark motive behind et all."

"And what do you think that motive could be?"

"Wull, now that you force my thinker along that line, thar is somethin' more that comes into my head."

"Out with it, Nate!"

"Wull, these hyer Wingate Mines aire wuth a hull heap of money, and if by ther death of the old man and the gal—"

"A clew at last!" interrupted Detective Dave. "But, great heavens! It does not seem possible that so beautiful a woman could be such a fiend as that. Ha! what is the matter with you, now, Nate? Has it jist burst upon you what you have done?"

CHAPTER XXXII.

DARING GAME PLAYED.

The ex-mayor was staring, almost wildly.

"Great wonders!" he ejaculated. "That was the last thing I'd 'a' thought of, that ther widdy could 'a' done et. I hadn't orter said what I did."

"But, you said it, and we must look it in the face. Do not mention it to another soul, but leave it to us to investigate."

"I have no desire to mention et, boys, you bet!"

"Have you ever seen or heard anything that would support the suspicion, Nate?" inquired Kris.

"I never have, sport."

"And I never have, either," asserted Kris. "It is a terrible accusation to make."

"And it must not be breathed without something to support it," decided Dave. "We must go very slow about it. But, we must find the young lady."

They were now opposite the hotel, and at that moment saw Mrs. Kenton come hurriedly out, with hat on.

A trolley car was at hand, and she signalled it to stop, and got aboard.

The car went spinning away up the street.

The road was not a long one, by any means, merely connecting one end of the gulch with the other.

Hard Pan straggled from end to end of the gulch, and this system of transit was in great favor among her people. Besides, it was a thing to boast of.

The trio watched the car, and presently saw it stop at the point nearest the mines. There the fair passenger got out and hastened up the slope.

"Ha! going to the mines!" exclaimed Kris. "What can be taking her there, I wonder? I'll bet it has something to do with the case, going at this time."

"You would 'a' thought she was goin' crazy, if you had seen her earlier than this," averred Nate.

"She seemed to take it hard, did she?"

"She was all cut up, and thar wasn't no shammin' about et, my opine."

"Can't you undertake to find out, Nate," asked Kris. "Another car will be going down that way in a few minutes."

"I'll try et, of course. I kin make my business to the mines to see the mayor, as he has gone thar, and mebbey I kin get on to something that is going on."

Nate left them and they crossed to the hotel. Kris led the way up stairs.

On the second floor he knocked at a door, but no one answering, he opened it and entered the room, the Denver detective following. It was a cool proceeding on their part, for the room was Mrs. Kenton's.

Once inside, Kris stopped with his back to the door, while the Denver detective made a tour of inspection, with as much haste as a half-close scrutiny would admit, through the suite of rooms, in the hope of finding some clew for their guidance.

It was a daring business, but that very daring gave it its security, as the detective had convinced the sport.

Detective Dave made one tour of the rooms in haste.

This was a general inspection. The next round he went more slowly, and decided which room had been occupied by Miss Kenton.

It did not require a Vidocq to determine that, for Mrs. Kenton's garments lay about in her sleeping apartment with little regard for neatness, which her disturbed state of mind would account for.

In the other room was Miss Kenton's trunk.

Dave tried its lid, but it was locked, and he could not afford the risk of prying into it, then.

Nothing was to be found that excited interest or suspicion, so he returned to the other.

"Anything?" asked Kris.

"Nothing," the answer.

"Is there another door leading into the hall?"

"No, this is the only one."

"Then it was necessary for her to pass through Mrs. Kenton's room?"

"Yes, as you see."

"What do you think of that?"

"It may, or may not, be called significant."

"Well, come, we must out of here."

"Yes, and the sooner the better. But, be sure the coast is clear."

Kris turned to the door, and Detective Dave took a look from the window, from a safe distance back.

"Hello!" he suddenly exclaimed, "here

is the explanation of the trip to the mines. Look here, sport!"

Kris looked where he pointed, and was surprised.

There came Mrs. Kenton, at the head of the forces from the mines, and all were coming in the direction of the hotel!

What did it mean? No matter, it gave the Pard Detectives excellent opportunity to escape from the room unnoticed, for excitement in the street soon drew all attention.

They slipped from the room and down into the bar-room, where they mingled with the throng, and no one noticed where they came from. All attention was upon Mrs. Kenton, and the mine force which she headed.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DAZED BILLY'S BLOW.

Mrs. Kenton at once mounting the steps to the piazza, turned and faced the crowd.

"Men of the Wingate Mines," she said, in clear tones, "you know why I have brought you here, but I desire that everybody else should know as well. The daughter of your late employer, my husband, has mysteriously disappeared from this house, and I want her found within an hour. To the man who will restore her to me within that time I will pay five thousand dollars!"

"Hooray!" yelled the men, and there was a general throwing up of hats.

"I want to urge upon you the importance of haste. There has been too much mystery in this little city of the mountains of late, and it is time that it came to an end," she added.

Ed Sawyer stepped forward from among his men.

"May I ask a question or two?" he inquired, lifting his hat.

"Yes, but be brief; let the men get to work. What do you want to know?"

"Had the young lady an enemy in the camp?"

"Not to my knowledge. She had not a single acquaintance when she came here."

"And there is absolutely no clew?"

"None."

"Then, I fear, you have given the men a task they cannot accomplish. For my part, I do not see what they are going to do as a beginning."

"They must do something—do you understand?—something! Let them go out of town by every trail and path, and keep on until she is found. There are men enough, besides, to search every inch of the town."

She seemed wildly in earnest.

"Very well; it shall be done," said Sawyer. "You have heard the word, men; be off with you, and good luck to you. Lucky the man who finds the young lady and can bring her back within an hour."

"Suppose it is over an hour, but he brings her back all the same?" one man inquired.

"No matter, no matter," cried the woman. "The reward will be the same. Go—go!" Then she hurriedly entered the house.

The men broke and scattered, eager to win the reward.

"Well, what think you now?" asked Kid-Glove Kris of his companion.

"That she is a born actress, if she is not innocent," was the answer.

"Ha! then you suspect—"

"No, I am inclined to think her innocent and thoroughly in earnest."

"Hillo, boys! Hyer ye be, hey?"

It was Nate Hawkins. He had come down with the others from the mines, in company with Billy Blow.

"Yes, what do you know?" asked Kris.

"Nothin', except that Billy performed his part nobly. Here he is to speak for himself."

The four left the hotel and sauntered across toward the Metropolitan, which they entered and took seats at a table.

"Oh, yes," then explained Billy. "I

gave 'em a straight stand-off, you bet! They pumped me, and I let 'em pump me dry. I told 'em that you two wur the best fellers that Mrs. Brown-Blow had ever taken in beneath her roof since she'd become a new woman, and they swollered et."

"I can imagine their main concern was to know whether we were out of the house late last night or not," suggested Dave.

"Exactly so! And, what did I tell 'em? Why, I told 'em that me and Nate and you two played poker more'n half the night, and they swollered that, too, all in a chunk."

"Good for you!" exclaimed Kris. "Stand by us, and we'll stand by you when the time comes."

"And it's comin'," assumed the bummer.

"What's coming?"

"Ther time when I'm going to reassume charge of my own shanty."

"Ha! then you are going to strike?"

The Pard Detectives were amused, in spite of their serious anxiety for Miss Kenton.

"That is jist what I am, you bet!"

"Bill Blow! Has anybody seen Bill Blow?"

It was the voice of the amazon, at the door, and she was looking all around the great room.

At the very first sound of her voice, Mr. Blow had ducked his head, and he made haste to whisper the request that his presence be concealed.

"I want to find him, that's all!" declared the woman. "If any of you see him, send him home. The Chinees—Ha! there you are, you vagabond! Why didn't you answer when I called ye?"

Bill had met with a mishap; trying to keep out of sight, the chair suddenly went from under him, and down came Bill, flat on the floor.

The woman made for him.

"What is the matter, Mrs. Brown-Blow?" demanded Kid-Glove Kris.

"He'll find out what's the matter," she retorted, making a reach for the man under the table.

"Keep cool, Mrs. Brown-Blow, keep cool!" advised the culprit, moving further under the table, out of her reach. "What is all the 'citement about, anyhow? Ain't you havin' things your own sweet way?"

"I want you, you brute! You hear?"

"Never you mind about me, m'dear! never you mind about me; I am all right, you bet!"

"But, I do mind about you. Chop has gone and left me, and you have got to take his place in the kitchen and do the work. Do you hear that?"

There was something akin to a bellow, and Bill Blow came out from under the table on the other side, with an expression of countenance hard to describe. He stared and blowed, for a moment, and was just on the point of exploding, when a commotion was heard in the street that drew all attention.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

DAVE FINDS A CLEW.

Everybody in the place made a dash for the doors—even Mrs. Brown-Blow.

Men were running from every direction. The Cosmopolitan was on fire, and heavy smoke was issuing from two of the upper windows!

"Something new on the programme, Kris?"

"Yes, decidedly. What think?"

"I take it to be accidental, don't you?"

"Not easy to say, but let's lend a hand," proposed Kris.

"Don't be in a hurry," cautioned Detective Dave. "Remember, we are in disguise; also, that we have got work of another kind to perform."

"You are right. What do you propose that we do? I am at your command."

"There will be a break into the hotel in a few moments, and we'll join in with

the crowd to see how Mrs. Kenton is conducting herself."

The street was packed with people in a few brief minutes. The mayor taking charge, was calling for volunteers to form a bucket brigade.

But, the big hotel was not altogether unprovided with means for coping with fire. It had two tanks on the roof, both of which were filled with water.

Kris and Dave, making their way to the side door of the house, entered there.

The guests were out in the halls and on the stairs, and as the Pard Detectives made their way up the first flight of stairs they met Mrs. Kenton coming down.

She had an armful of things hastily gathered up, and was calling for some one to save the trunks in her rooms.

"Which are your rooms, ma'm?" asked Dave.

"The first door on the right, toward the front. Save those trunks, and I will reward you, my man."

"All right, we'll try et, ma'm."

The pards ran on.

The door was now wide open, and when they entered the first thing to claim their attention was a package of papers on the floor. The woman had evidently dropped it in her flight.

The detective, picking it up, thrust it into his pocket.

Into the sleeping-rooms the pards hastened.

One trunk stood open.

Kid-Glove Kris had gone on into the other room, and was picking up the trunk belonging to Myra.

Detective Dave peered into the open trunk, and the first thing, almost, to meet his eye was a photograph—the face of one he had seen before!

"Ha! a clew at last!" he joyously spoke. "Now I know that I am on the right track, and the end cannot be far distant. But, no time to waste here; I must save the trunk."

He thrust the photograph into his pocket, with the packet of papers, and closing the lid, swung the trunk up on his shoulder and followed Kid-Glove Kris out into the hall, where the confusion had grown even greater.

"Clear the stairs!" cried Kris, in ringing tones. "Come or go! You can gain nothing standing still!"

Kris pressed on, Detective Dave close behind him.

The lower hall was so packed with people, however, as was the piazza, that it was impossible for them to get through and out.

"Clear the way!" Kris shouted again. "You are doing more harm than good; wedged in there. Back out of doors, or we'll fall all over you with these trunks!"

Pushing right ahead, while speaking, the crowd moved. The jam was broken, and the pards got out with the trunks.

Mrs. Kenton was there on the piazza, pinned back against one of the posts by the crowd.

At sight of the trunks, the look of anxiety on her face relaxed.

"Take care of them, my men!" she called out.

"You bet!" sang out Kid-Glove Kris, keeping up the assumed character. "We'll sot on 'em, if necessary, ma'm!"

They pushed and shoved their way to the steps, and down, and deposited the trunks on the ground at a safe distance from the hotel, and stood up on them.

By this time the bucket brigade had been formed, and water was passing from hand to hand. The line was forming through the hall and up the stairs, and would soon have been of excellent service, but, just then, the proprietor appeared at one of the top windows.

The smoke, by the way, had grown less in volume during the last minute or two.

"Hold on, boys, hold on!" he shouted.

And he had to shout, indeed, to make the crowd hear, above all the babel of voices.

Kris and Dave were about the first to

see him, and from their elevated positions above the heads of the others, they shouted to those around them until the attention of the crowd was gained.

"No more water needed, boys!" the proprietor bellowed. "We have got the fire under control, now, and have lots of water to spare. I thank you just the same, though, every man of you, and will make it worth your while when I get down there."

Some one proposed a cheer, and it was given with a will.

The smoke gradually thinned out, the excitement ceased, the crowd unpacked itself, and people began to move in their accustomed ways once more.

Then it was learned that the fire had been caused by a man who had fallen asleep with a cigar in his mouth, which had dropped upon a pile of newspapers.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SOMETHING CONVINCING.

When the crowd thinned, Mrs. Kenton made her way to where the Pard Detectives were guarding the two trunks. They were still standing upon them, but the moment the woman appeared the comrades jumped down in haste.

"Beg yer parding," Kris hastened to say. "I had clean furgotten where I was at and what I was standin' on."

"Same with me, ma'm," declared Dave. "Will ye have us tote 'em back again?"

"I must first reward you for saving them for me—"

"Not a bit, ma'm!" protested Kris. "Et was our dooty, an' we done et. We would do et again on ther same terms, I opine."

"I opine we would, and glad to," assented Dave. "No reward, ma'm: not a red! Pick up yer trunk, pardner, and we'll land 'em up them 'ar stairs in no time, and consider et a honor."

The woman tried to urge money upon them, but, shouldering the trunks again, they marched into the house and up the stairs to her rooms, where they deposited their burdens.

"Thar they be, ma'm!" from Kris; "sound as ary dollar."

"Jist as good as if et hadn't happened," added Dave. "Glad et was no wuss."

"And so am I," averred the woman, earnestly. "If you will not allow me to pay you, you must accept my thanks for the great service. The trunk contained many valuable papers."

"Don't mention et, ma'm!" protested Kris.

"And if thar is anything more we kin do, you have oniy to tell us," Dave added.

"There is only one other thing, and, oh! if you only could do that! I am nearly crazed over the absence of my dear husband's daughter, and if you could only restore her to me!"

"We'll try that, too, ma'm, assured Kris.

"Bet yer life," echoed Dave.

And then, acting as if bashful in a lady's presence, and as if not knowing what to say, they backed out of the room and made their way down to the street.

At the door they met the mayor.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "Where you been?"

"Been to the fire; whar d'ye 'spose?" responded Kris.

"You are around early, for fellows who were up nearly all night."

"I'll bet Nate guv that away!" from Dave, looking at Kris. "Yes, we wur up ruther late, that's the fact."

"But we had a pile of fun out of it," asserted Kris. "You had orter been there to taken a hand in, mayor. You would got your money's worth, you bet!"

The mayor was convinced. His face showed that; and he went on.

"I guess that settles the doubt in his mind," decided Kris.

"Yes, I guess we put the clincher on it. But, what a whirl his brain must be in! He is in a worse naze than we have

been; but, pard, I begin to see my way out. I've struck a clew!"

"No! That is too good news. What is the clew?" demanded the other.

"Like this," and Dave took the photograph from his pocket and gave his companion a glimpse of it.

"The deuce!" cried Kris.

"You recognize the face, then?"

"Of course. The man who was found dead and taken for you."

"Exactly."

"Where did you get it?"

"In Mrs. Kenton's trunk."

"Great heavens! Then what do you infer?"

"I don't know what to suspect or infer, just yet."

"There can be no doubt about the face; that is out of the question."

"But, Kris, this is not all I found. You saw me pick up some papers on the floor. We must examine them, and see what they reveal, if anything."

They had proceeded on their way as they talked, and went direct to their room at Mrs. Brown-Blow's.

When they had closed the door they put up a shade and drew chairs to the table, to examine the papers.

Almost the first one opened was a marriage certificate, setting forth that, on a certain date, one Burk More and Marie Snider had been made man and wife.

Detective Dave read it aloud.

"What do you think of that?" he demanded, looking exultantly at his comrade.

"Do you think it is she?"

"The name is the same."

"And it was found in her possession!"

"The evidence is good so far. Now, who was Burk More? Was this the man?" and he held up the photograph.

"Suppose it was," queried Kris, "and suppose that the woman had been married to him. What then?"

"Then she was not the wife of Thomas Kenton, and has no claim on his estate! But, that is all guess work. We have no knowledge who this fellow was, save that he was a rascal."

The certificate and photograph were laid aside, and the other papers were taken up.

The next paper opened was a letter, written in a woman's hand, and it ran as follows:

"Burk:—

"I tell you again that you have got to have patience and give me time. You will not gain anything by being in a hurry, I warn you. Do not imagine that you can scare me, for you ought to know that you cannot do that. I am working the game for all it is worth, and in due time it will come out all right. But, if you push me, you will spoil everything. As to the sport, that is none of your business, as things are. I have to play the part of the position I am at present in.

MARIE."

"Where are we at?" said Dave Coleman, triumphantly.

"Whom does she mean by the sport?" from Kris. "I hope she does not mean me!"

"It looks that way. By heavens, Kris, here is a terrible evidence against that woman!"

"Yes, evidence that must be investigated," said Kris, grimly. "If guilty so far, she would be equal to—"

"To the murder of Thomas Kenton and of removing his daughter, so that she herself might come in for all the property. And, much more than that besides, as you can but see," assumed Dave, in seeming confidence now of the ground he stood on.

"But, there are other letters and papers," suggested his pard. "Let us see the thing to the end."

And so they did, and the revelation made, if their other suspicions were correct, were startling.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DETECTIVE DAVE'S DISCOVERY.

These discoveries gave the Pard Detectives plenty of work to do, but fate was destined to step in and take a hand in the game, and there was a tragedy just ahead which they little anticipated.

Even before the working out of the now pretty evident imposture of the assumed widow was the finding of Myra Kenton; that was the two pard's greatest concern.

The girl could not be found; not the slightest trace of her, not the faintest clew, could be discovered.

The active search had been given over, so far as it had concerned the whole town, and Mrs. Kenton was, apparently, in despair. Her face was pale and there was a troubled look in her eyes.

No one who saw her face could doubt the sincerity of her anxiety.

Two persons there, at Hard Pan, however, could attribute her anxiety to an entirely different cause.

Knowing what they did, Kris and Dave could lay it to the discovery of her loss of the important papers and photograph.

Shortly after dinner, when they were passing the hotel, they saw her on the piazza, and, seeing them, she signaled them to stop.

They did so, touching their hats.

"Tell me," she said, eagerly, "have you been able to learn anything about Miss Kenton?"

"Not a thing, ma'm," answered Kris, sadly. "Et is too bad, but et is a case that would puzzle even old Solomon, I opine."

"Yes, I begin to think so myself. Heaven help the poor child, wherever she may be. Do not give up, my good men, but do all in your power to aid in solving the mystery."

"You kin rely on that, ma'm," assured Dave. And they passed on.

"I was afraid she would inquire about the papers, whether we had seen them or not."

"No fear of that, which convinces me that she and Marie More are one and the same."

"Must confess I don't see any proof of that."

"Why, to ask about them would be proof that she is the loser, and if she makes no mention about such a loss, she will have some ground for denying the papers if they come to light."

"I see; it is a fair inference."

"But, her worried face shows something."

"Yes, either honest concern for Myra or dread for her own safety. But, I can't think her guilty—really, I can't."

"Well, I hope she is not, but there will be a good deal for her to explain away, if that man was Burk More."

"Which brings us back to business. We must get into our other disguises, separate, and start inquiry about him and see what is to be learned."

"There is one thing more important than that—the discovery of Myra; but, I am inclined now to believe that the quickest way to find her is to bend all our energies to the other matter," avowed Dave. "Bring that to a head as soon as possible, for I now feel it may give us a clew to her whereabouts, even if it does not bring a confession from the guilty one."

They parted company, to make their required changes, and, ere long, they were in entirely different make-up.

The afternoon wore along, and waned, when, as if by a sudden inspiration, as he was thinking moodily over the situation, all by himself, Dave exclaimed:

"Why in the world didn't I think of that before? Uncle Josh! He is her friend, and perhaps she has gone to him."

And, almost simultaneous with the thought, came sight of the stage as it lumbered down the gulch and into the main street of the camp. Josh on the seat.

Detective Dave left the place where he

had been meditating, and hastened down to meet it.

The stage came on and stopped at its usual place before the Cosmopolitan, and its complement of passengers alighted.

There were none with whom we have concern, and after the mail had been put out and the baggage taken down, Uncle Josh drove around to the stables to put up his team.

Detective Dave sauntered around in that direction.

Uncle Josh was not engaged there very long, and when he started away the Denver Detective accosted him.

"Hold on a minute, Uncle Josh," he said.

The driver turned and looked at him, trying hard to recognize him.

"Wull, what is et?" he asked. "I thort I knowed yer voice, but blame me ef I know yer face."

"No matter, I wanted to ask you if you knew anything whatever about that young lady you brought here yesterday, Miss Kenton. She is missing, and cannot be found."

"Thunderation! Now I know ye, boy. Put et thar! Do I know anything about that purty gal, hey? Wull, now, I ain't supposed ter know anything, but seein' it's you, jist read this hyer leetle note what I was told to hand to ye, if I fell in with ye."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

HONOR BOUND.

Detective Dave was agreeably surprised.

This was more than he had dared to hope for, in the way of success.

He knew that he was mistaken for Kid-Glove Kris, but he could not stop to explain in a moment.

He was too eager to learn something of the young woman with whom he had fallen in love, and as the note was not sealed, he opened it immediately and read it.

Even as he did so, he thought that it was something that Kid-Glove Kris would have done himself, under like circumstances, and it would be easy for him to explain it to the sport when they met. He wanted to deal honorably with his pard, according to their compact.

The missive ran as follows:

"Mr. Dursey:

"If you receive this, come to me at once, for I must talk with you. You will be told where to find me. Do not delay, for I have a terrible suspicion and need the aid of some one whom I can trust implicitly, and your face has convinced me that I can trust you. I know that you are innocent of the crime that has been laid to your charge. Myra Kenton."

"Thank God, she is alive!" were his first words.

"Yes, alive and kickin', but in a turrible state of mind, or was this mornin'."

"Where is she?"

"Then she ain't been found? But, ye told—"

"No, no, there has been no trace of her discovered. Tell me where she is."

"You come right with me, pard, and I will take ye to her in a jiffy. She must be half wild by this time, if she has had to keep out of sight all day."

"No, no, I can't go with you, old man."

"Ye can't go?"

"No. I am—"

"What's ther reason ye can't go? This hyer is the first time I ever knowed ye to desert beauty in distress, Kid-Glove Kris."

"There is just the point, old man. I am not Kid-Glove Kris—"

"Not Kid-Glove Kris!"

"No."

There was no one near to hear them.

"Then who in thunderation aire ye? Ye passed yerself fer him, jist now."

"I was too eager to learn about the young lady to stop to explain, that was all. Now that I know what is wanted, I

cannot honorably go and see her, but I will hunt up Dursey at once."

"But, who aire ye?"

"The man who has been taken for Kid-Glove Kris."

"And who the blazes is that?"

"I am not at liberty to tell, at present. I will go and make a search for the sport, and will send him to your house immediately."

"Wull, durn et, it is enough to turn a man's head, take et all together, and I wonder that this hyer camp ain't a plum gone bedlam, by this time, with so much mystery around."

"It is soon going to be straightened out, now."

"Wull, I should hope so."

"Where do you live?"

"Kris knows that all right."

"And I want to know, too, in case I can't find him."

"Sure enough. Et's that shanty over thar, jist t'other side of them two jist alike."

"All right. Tell Miss Kenton that her note will be in the hands of Kid-Glove Kris inside of an hour, if he can be found. If not, I will come in his stead."

With that, Dave turned and walked hastily away.

His mind was in a confused state. The emotions of his heart might be said to be the same.

It was a test of his honor, for he well knew, or believed, that the first one to see Miss Kenton and talk with her would be the fortunate man, all provided that she was heart whole and fancy free.

How easy it would have been for him to have gone home with the stage driver, heard the girl's story, and taken advantage of the opportunity to have declared who he was. That, possibly, would have given him the advantage over Kris, but he was not so lost to honor.

No, he must find Kid-Glove Kris.

He went back up the main street, keeping his eyes well about him.

At last he espied the sport, recognizing him by knowing what disguise to expect to find him wearing.

Dave gave a signal that had been agreed upon, and Kris followed him into the Metropolitan, where they took seats at a table in order to have a few minutes' chat.

"What is it?" Kris asked.

"Read that," said Dave, handing him the note.

This the sport did, eagerly enough.

"Where did you get it?" he asked. "Where is she? Have you seen her? Tell me all, pard."

"I got it from Uncle Josh. She is at his house. He mistook me for you, and so it came about. No, I have not seen her; the note was addressed to you, not me."

Their eyes met.

"I understand," said Kris, extending his hand across the table. "You are keepin' your part of our agreement, pard, and I won't forget to keep mine. I will go and see her at once."

"And you will let me know what she discloses?"

"To the last word, Coleman."

"Good enough. Would it be asking too much to request that you tell her, in strict confidence, who I am, and that I am on the case with all my heart and soul? I think she should know that, don't you?"

Again their eyes met, honest eyes that knew no wavering.

"Yes, I do," said Kris. "I will tell her, and whatever her answer is I will tell you that also."

They clasped hands once again, and Kris rose and left the room in some haste, making his way straight to Uncle Josh's humble domicile.

The old driver was just eating his supper, which his good wife always had ready for him when he came in from his trip, and Kris promptly made himself known.

"I don't know who that pard of your'n

kin be," said the old man, "but he has got a white soul, I'm bettin'."

"Why do you say that, Uncle Josh?" the sport asked.

"I have my reasons, boy."

Kris did not press the point.

"Where is the young lady?" he inquired.

"She is right here in the parlor, sir," said the old driver's wife.

She indicated with a wave of the hand the door of the best room of the three, giving it that dignified name.

"Will you ask her if I may see her now?"

"No need to ask her, she has looked her eyes sore for ye this whole day. Come right this way, if ye please."

The woman crossed the big living room and opened the door of the room indicated, Kris following her and entering just behind her, walking as if entering a sacred place.

"Here is the man at last, miss," she said. "This is Kid-Glove Kris, the sport."

She waved an awkward introduction, and hastily withdrew.

Kris saw Myra on a chair near a window.

The room was not very light, the windows being small and the shades of night beginning to hover.

"You are Mr. Dursey?" a sweet voice asked.

"Yes, I am he," said the sport. "I only just now got your note."

"I supposed Uncle Josh failed to see you before he went away, and I have been patiently waiting for him to find you after his return."

"Well, what is it, Miss Kenton. Why did you leave the hotel in that mysterious way, and cause your friends so much anxiety on your account? The place has been upset all day."

"My friends?" she said sadly. "Who are they?"

"You have many here—I am one, if you will allow me to say it."

"I thank you," she said, and her gaze dropped to her lap. "There is one favor I want to ask of you, and now that I know you are my friend I know I may not hesitate. Will you not take the place of that detective who lost his life, and try to solve these mysteries?"

"I would, willingly," said Kris, "but the fact of the matter is, Miss Kenton, he is here alive and well, and is managing the thing himself, with every prospect of bringing it to a termination very shortly. I am helping him, however, and together we hope that this interview with you will give us something to work upon. What can you tell us?"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

WHAT MYRA KNEW.

The girl had now lifted her eyes, and was looking into Kris's own.

He had taken a seat close to her, upon her invitation, and he could hardly resist the temptation to touch her hand.

"You say he is alive?" she said, excitedly.

"Yes, he is alive. The man who was found dead was not he, but some fellow unknown."

"But, how, then, came he by the letters and papers that were found in his pockets? There is more mystery than ever, I believe."

Kris explained the point as known to the reader.

"Who, then was that man?" the girl queried, wonderingly.

"That remains to be discovered, and Mr. Coleman will do it, if any one can."

"But, where is Mr. Coleman? What manner of disguise is he in? Can it be that he is the man who has been mistaken for you so often?"

"He is the man."

"Mercy! how am I to tell you apart?"

"It will not be necessary, for we are both your friends."

"Yes, but there is a reason why I

desire to know you from him—here, wear this ring."

Of a sudden, as if acting upon an instant's impulse, she drew a ring from her middle finger and handed it to him, and he slipped it onto the little finger of his left hand.

"You must have a strong reason for wanting to know me at any time," he said.

"No matter about that. A glance at your hand will tell me whether it is you or Mr. Coleman. Now, for the object I had in sending for you."

"Yes, yes, that is the all important matter, now."

"I want you to protect me."

"Protect you?"

"Yes."

"Against whom?"

"My father's widow."

"Great heavens! you don't look for danger from her?"

"Yes, I do. I might think I am wronging her, had it not been for that look on her face—"

She shuddered as she recalled it.

"What do you refer to?" asked Kris. "Tell me all about it."

"She was out late last night, at an hour when no good woman would be out, alone—"

"Yes, I know, I know."

"Then it was you she went to meet?"

"No, no, I swear it was not I; but I heard it from some one who saw her."

"Then it was Coleman, and she mistook him for you. Do not try to deny it, for I know that much of the matter. Why should she desire to meet you at that hour?"

Kris was in a tight place, and knew not what to answer.

"I know the reason," the girl went on, after a momentary pause. "It was because she loves you, and loving you, she was false to my poor father—I do not dare think worse of her than that; God knows that is bad enough. Now, I want to ask a question."

"What is it?"

"Do you love her?"

"I do not."

"Do you care anything for her?"

"No more than I care for any chance woman acquaintance, I assure you."

"Then you are in danger, deadly danger. I must tell you, even though modesty might forbid. She is jealous of you, if you know what that implies."

"Jealous of me?"

"Yes, jealous of you."

"In what direction, pray?"

"There is no use hiding it, she is jealous of you because of me—As I said, I must tell you, no matter what the cost to myself."

"Yes, tell me, for I dare not ask a question."

"She knew that I believed you innocent, because your face seemed to tell me you were, and I confessed to her that I had an interest in you—and—and she took a stronger meaning out of it, is all I can say."

"And she threatened you?"

"Listen, I will tell you all. She was out last night, as I said, and as you knew. When she came in I was up, wondering where she could be. At first she was surprised, but she made light of it and tried to allay my suspicions, but somehow she appeared to me to be too loving."

"We talked about Mr. Coleman—or, that is to say, the man who was found dead and taken for him. I made the suggestion that perhaps it was not he, and the look on her face for a single flashing instant chilled me. 'Not he!' she cried. And then she demanded my reason for thinking so, which I gave her, because the man's face had not pleased me, and I could not think of Mr. Coleman as such a looking man."

"What did she say to that?"

"She said she did not see how it could be possible, and referred to the papers in his pocket. We did not say much

more, after that, but retired, and for once she forgot to embrace me. She had been so loving from the very first that it surprised me. I did not lie down at once, and presently was tempted to look at her from my room—from behind the door, as I will confess; and the look that I saw on her face fairly chilled me to the bone. I thought for the instant that I would cry out, but I did not, and while I looked I saw her shake her fist in the direction of my room."

Kid-Glove Kris was an attentive listener, and no wonder.

"Well, I could not go to sleep. I lay there on the bed, trembling with fright, till at last her heavy breathing told me that she was asleep, when, after waiting long enough to make sure that she must be sound asleep, I rose and began to dress myself, resolved upon seeking shelter somewhere else. This was the only place I knew of, Uncle Josh having pointed out his house to me as we were coming into town, and I made up my mind to steal out of the room and come here secretly and ask for shelter and protection. And that was not all, for, while I was getting ready, the very worst of all happened."

"What was that?" asked Kris.

"Why, she cried out in her sleep, 'Do not ask mercy of me!' she cried. 'I will have your heart's blood!' Oh! how her words ring in my ears. 'I have no love for you, and if I ever said so it was mockery. I hate you! I despise you! There! lie there and die like the dog that you are!' Oh! it was terrible. Can you wonder that I made haste to get away from her?"

"Not at all," said Kris. "You had pluck of the right sort."

"Well, I waited till she had become quiet and her breathing had grown regular again, and then I stole out of the rooms and out of the house, and came here, where I was taken in by these good people, who promised not to reveal my presence to a living soul."

"And what do you think of it all?"

"Great heavens! what else can I think?"

"Than what?"

"Than that she herself killed my father, and would have killed me, had I not escaped her. God forgive me if I wrong her, but the thought is fixed in my mind and I cannot force it out."

"What would be her motive?"

"Why, to come in for all the property herself, with the idea in mind of winning you—I am sure that was a part of the scheme. I am a woman, and I can read her heart far enough to make out that much. If you do not love her, she madly adores you."

Myra Kenton spoke earnestly and with intensity of emotion.

"And what do you desire me to do?"

Kris asked. "You do not want her arrested? You do not want to make such a charge—"

"No, no, I could never do that. Besides, I have no proof, you see, even if my suspicion is right. No, I wanted you to take Mr. Coleman's place and ferret out the mystery of it all."

"Well, he is here to do that for you, and he will be glad enough to learn what you have told me, for it will bear out some suspicions that he has already formed concerning her. By the way, did you ever see a photograph that she had in her trunk?"

"No, I never saw her trunk open."

"Well, did you ever hear her mention the name of Burk More—"

"Ha!" as she sprang suddenly to her feet, "that's the name! She spoke a name, when she was talking so wildly in her sleep, and I have been trying all day to think of it. That was it, that was it!"

"Then new light is thrown upon the matter," said Kris. "I will find Coleman at once, and will put the matter into his hands, just as it stands. With him

to direct and me to follow, we may be able to bring the mystery to a termination in a short time."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

BILLY BLOW BLOWS HARD.

They talked on for a few minutes, and Kid-Glove Kris took leave.

He was almost overcome by what he had heard, and his mind was in a whirl with it all.

His emotions were something that he could not have described, even had he been called on to do so. His love for the young woman had increased.

It had been arranged that he should meet Coleman at supper, and so he made haste to change his disguise and go to Mrs. Brown-Blow's hospitable domicile, once more as Ben Gibson.

They were eating supper when he entered.

"Hillo!" he exclaimed. "Hard at et, airo ye, and waitin' fur me, I see."

"Ye won't see much, ef ye don't git to yer place and git yer knife and fork in motion," said his supposed brother.

The sport took his place and fell to, and presently he noticed that the landlady herself was absent from her accustomed place at the board, and he asked where she was.

Immediately the whole company burst out laughing.

"What's ter matter?" queried Ben, looking from one to another in a questioning way. "What's in a little question like that?"

"She ain't Mrs. Brown-Blow any longer," spoke up his supposed brother. "She is simply Mrs. Bill Blow now, and she is in the kitchen in proper attire doing the cooking."

"Is it possible?"

"Bet yer life et's possible," chimed in another voice, at that moment, as into the room stalked Bill Blow, as big as life, if not a little bigger.

He was in whole attire, looked clean and spruce, and a pair of big guns bristled in his belt. He had on new boots, with his new jean trousers stuffed inside of them, and a new red shirt.

He looked the typical miner on a Sunday.

"Yes, sir-ee, bet yer life et is!" he repeated. "I have put on ther breeches once again, and I am goin' to wear 'em, henceforth and forever, or know the reason why, b'gosh! Mrs. Blow kin be as free as she wants to, jist as free as the air, but she has got to be jist a woman, and nothin' more, ef she wants to put up in this ranch."

"Bill!" from the kitchen.

"That's her," said Billy, with a jerk of his thumb in that direction.

"Bill Blow!"

"That's me, that's my name, and not a bit ashamed of et," Billy called out. "What is et you want, Mrs. Bill Blow?"

"Here's these taters, ready fur the table."

"Well, tote 'em in, Mrs. Blow."

"You jist come and git 'em."

"Nary a come. I am not playin' waiter, though I will help ye out till ye kin git help. Tote 'em in."

"I can't do it, and you know it, with nothin' to wear—"

"Hold on thar, Mrs. Blow, hold on thar," Billy interrupted. "You have got on a dress, and it's hull and clean; what more d'ye want?"

"And do you think I will be seen in a dress? Do you think I will show myself in this badge of servitude and serfdom?" quoting from some paper she had read, no doubt. "No, sir!"

"Then you will never be seen at all, Susan Blow, you kin bet your sweet life on that," said Billy.

"Where are the bloomers?" asked Kris.

"Gone up ther 'ume," said Billy, with a slow wink of the eye. "When I was invited to play cook in this shebang, I by gosh made up my mind that I would play first fiddle or none, and I'm playin'."

"But, the bloomers?"

"Wull, when I got home Mrs. Blow was in ther kitchen doin' things up, and she had put on a dress to save ther bloomers from gittin' spotted, and I took a sneak around fur that bloomer wardrobe, and I found it. In jist about two mighty minutes every cussed pair of bloomers had gone up in smoke!"

They had to laugh at his droll way of telling it.

"I had been keepin' straight all day, havin' made up my mind, ye see, and I sneaked out and kept out ov sight till it was comin' nigh feed time, when I kem rollin' home and found Mrs. Blow runnin' around wuss'n a hen with her head off, lookin' fur them bloomers, and then I took charge of ther ranch, in the name of the law and Bill Blow, and hyer I be."

"And ashamed you had orter be to own to it!" cried a voice at the door, and there was Mrs. Blow.

Only her head was visible, however.

"Proudest day of my life," cried Billy. "Made a man of myself to-day, and made a woman of you—Ha! ha! ha!"

"I want you to understand, Bill Blow—"

"And I expect to understand, Mrs. Bill Blow. And so will you, by the time this thing is settled. I am master here once more, and you are the master's wife, see?"

"Would you make me a slave?"

"Not at all, not at all. As I said before, you kin be jist as free as ther little chicky-dees that sing in ther trees, but you have got to be a woman or you have got to git out. No more fool business about this ranch, or there will be trouble."

Some one asked for potatoes.

Taking the cue, another asked, and there was a clamor for potatoes.

"Mrs. Blow, d'ye hear?" called out Billy.

"I hear nothin'," came back the retort from a distant quarter of the kitchen, Mrs. Blow having beaten a retreat from the door.

"Tote in them taters!"

"If you want taters, you kin jist tote 'em yerself, Bill Blow."

"I kin, hey? We'll see about that," and Billy jerked the two formidable guns out of his belt. "This hyer question might jist as well be settled first as last."

He made a dash for the kitchen, as if in pursuit of a desperado.

There were some quick, sharp words, a feminine protest or two, and then steps in hasty approach.

Into the dining-room marched Mrs. Blow, arrayed in a fresh gingham gown and apron, bearing a platter of potato balls, her face very red, and Bill coming behind with the nose of a gun on the back of her neck.

"Gentlemen, 'low me to interdoose my wife," said Bill, with positiveness.

Mrs. Blow deposited the platter not gently on the board.

"Can it be possible?" said Kid-Glove Kris.

"Mrs. Blow, you look charming!" exclaimed Detective Dave, rising and offering her his hand. "If there is anything in this world I admire, it is a womanly woman. Believe me, you look superb!"

"In—in these things?" she gasped.

"That other garb was a disgrace to your sex, madam, on my honor," said Dave.

"That's right, ma'm," agreed Kid-Glove Kris, to remind Dave of his assumed character. "You look twice as young in this hyer dress as what ye did in them other toggeries."

The word having been passed among them, all the others at the table expressed the same sentiment, and Mrs. Blow looked pleased.

"That is jist what I say," declared Billy, having put up his guns. "I am now ready to strike a bargain with ye, Susan: No more bloomers and no more new woman foolery on your part, and no more booze on mine. What d'ye say?"

I'll go to work like a man soon's I kin hit a job."

The womanly heart was touched, and tears appeared in her eyes.

"It's a bargain, Bill. I was gittin' ruther tired of it, honest, but I was too proud to give in."

"Put et thar, Susan!" cried Billy, offering his hand. "We'll begin business over again under the old name, and ef we don't more'n make things hum you kin kick me fur a sick cat!"

Bill embraced his wife and kissed her, and there was a glow of genuine happiness on the woman's face that had not been seen there in many a day.

Attention was drawn from them by a loud knock at the door.

Immediately following, the door opened and into the room trooped some half a score of men with guns drawn.

Mrs. Blow screamed, at sight of them, and all at the table leaped to their feet, reaching to their hips, but they were covered immediately and ordered to desist.

The leader of the band was Sheriff Hickey in person.

He advanced straight to the pretending Gibson brothers, looking first at one and then the other, and demanded:

"Which one of you two is Kid-Glove Kris, the sport?"

"If you think either, sir, suppose you decide for yourself," said Detective Dave.

CHAPTER XL.

THE LOST ONE FOUND.

The beginning of the end was at hand. The Pledged Pard looked at each other, and seemed to understand. They were covered by too many guns to think of offering to resist the arrest by force.

The sheriff and his men looked from one to the other of the pair, and were unable to settle the question to their satisfaction.

"Off with your disguises!" commanded the sheriff.

It would have been only a useless waste of time to have parleyed about it. The Pard Detectives removed their false hair and beards, and there they stood, two men so nearly alike that their identity was more of a puzzle than ever.

"Well, which is your man?" demanded Kid-Glove Kris.

"That is what I want to know," avowed the sheriff. "You had better own up; fair warning!"

"You will probably agree that there cannot be two Kid-Glove Krises," suggested Dave. "It is for you to decide which is your man, and take him."

"By heavens! I'll take you both; then there can be no mistake!"

"It would be the mistake of your life," warned Kris.

"How is that, confound you?"

"One of us is not Kid-Glove Kris."

"Then it is for you to say which one is."

"This thing may as well end. I am Kid-Glove Kris, sheriff!" acknowledged the sport.

"What proof have I of it, when you both look so alike?"

"You have my word for it, here in the presence of these witnesses."

"Then you are my prisoner. I warn you not to make an attempt to get away, or it may cost you your life, and I would deplore that."

"I am not a fool, sheriff."

"Sheriff," now spoke up Detective Dave, "you are arresting an innocent man."

"So he has said, but can he prove it?"

"If he cannot, I can!"

"How?"

"By producing the guilty person!"

"The deuce you say! Who the mischief are you, then?"

"I am David Coleman, the detective supposed to have been killed by some person unknown!"

"Is it possible?"

"It is positive."

"And who is the guilty one?"

"Mrs. Marie Kenton!"

"Good God! You don't mean to say you can prove that?"

"I do, and can!"

Consternation was depicted on every face.

"Then why have you not arrested her?" the sheriff demanded.

"Because I had not worked the case quite out to my satisfaction. Some links are wanting."

"Ha! I thought so. And I guess they will always be wanting, too, if you think to fasten the crime upon that woman. It is terrible!"

"It is fastened upon her already, to my satisfaction," asserted Dave. "I admit that my proof is not positive, but it is more than enough to warrant her arrest."

"Then you intend to arrest her?"

"I do, certainly."

"When?"

"At once. Now that you have called the game, hands may as well be shown all around."

"Well, if that is your intent—"

"It is my next step."

"Then let us be about it, and have the disagreeable matter over with. In my office as sheriff, I have only to see that the proper person is secured, and if she is the guilty one, so be it."

"And what about me?" asked Kris.

"You are under arrest."

"But I want to see this thing out. You have no proof that I am guilty of that crime, while here is a detective who assures you that I am innocent."

"Well?"

"Release me, and let me go with you. You may appoint two men to keep their eyes on me, if you want to."

"The fact of the matter is, you have no business to be under arrest, after the assurance I have given that I know the guilty one is another person," assumed Coleman.

"I am an officer of the county, sir," returned the sheriff, "and I have my ideas about that."

"And I," reminded Dave, "am an officer of the State."

"Well, we will let the matter stand as it is," decided the sheriff. "I will parole the prisoner for the present, until we see what comes of the charge you are about to bring against that woman."

"That is satisfactory."

"And when will you make the arrest?"

"Now, at once."

Dave reached for his hat, the others from the table doing the same, and they all filed out of the house, leaving Mrs. Blow wringing her hands and crying very like a woman of the old-fashioned type.

It was by this time growing dark. The electric lights were flashing, and the sparks of the trolley cars were seen as they moved up and down the gulch.

The sheriff, acting upon information he had received, had gone to the house quietly, with his men, and the people knew nothing as yet of what had taken place.

They went quietly to the hotel, and took their places on the piazza, as if merely stopping there casually.

A consultation there was held, and it was determined to leave the management of it all to the detective.

The sheriff and his men were to aid him in carrying out his plans, and the first direction he gave was that Miss Kenton should be brought to the scene as a beginning.

"Miss Kenton?" exclaimed the sheriff.

"Yes."

"Where is she, then?"

"At the house of Uncle Josh."

A few words of explanation had to be given, quietly.

"But will she willingly come with us?" the sheriff inquired. "What am I to say to her?"

"I can fix that," spoke up Kid-Glove Kris. "Hand her this ring," removing from his finger the ring Myra had given him, "and tell her to come here at once."

"Tell her that you desire her to come?"

"Yes. Tell her that I want her to come here, and send this ring as proof of it."

"And Uncle Josh and his wife with her," added Dave.

"All right."

"Then, when you come, a shout will be raised that the lost young lady has been found, and that will draw such a crowd as we desire to witness our denouement."

"You seem positive that you are right, young man."

"There can be scarcely a doubt of it, sheriff. It will rest with the woman to prove me in the wrong."

The sheriff in person set off for Uncle Josh's house, and the others awaited his return with somewhat of impatience.

By this time, too, people passing had begun to notice that something was on foot, and the nucleus of a crowd was beginning to form in front of the piazza to learn what it meant.

The sheriff had no trouble in inducing Myra to come with him. The ring and the word from Kid-Glove Kris were sufficient, and she made all haste to obey the summons. The reader has been privileged to know the motives by which she was actuated.

She was soon ready, and set forth under the sheriff's escort, accompanied by Uncle Josh and his wife, and as they drew near to the hotel a great cheer arose and the word was shouted that the missing lady had been found, that Myra Kenton had been discovered! Men and women came running from every direction, and by the time the sheriff reached the piazza the street was packed.

CHAPTER XLI.

DENOUEMENT AND CONFUSION.

Just as Myra mounted the steps, Mrs. Kenton came running out upon the piazza.

She had heard the shouting, and had seen Myra's approach from the windows of her room, and came down in haste to greet her and show her glad welcome and her rejoicing.

"My dear, my darling!" she cried, rushing toward Myra with open arms to embrace her.

Myra had just reached the top step.

"No! no! Keep away!"

So cried the young lady, taking the last step to the piazza and recoiling from the woman with horror depicted on her face.

"Do not touch me, she commanded, waving Marie away with both hands. The woman stopped short, her face growing like death in whiteness and her eyes dilating wildly.

"What do you mean?" she gasped. "What has come over you, Myra, dear? You are not in your right mind."

"Murderess!" cried Myra. "You killed my father, and you would—"

"It is false, false!" the woman screamed.

Sheriff Hickey and Detective Dave were stepping toward her, but quicker than a flash she drew a pistol from her pocket and sprang back against the wall, on the defensive!

"Back!" she cried, her eyes flashing. "Back! every man of you! I will drop the first one of you who comes nearer than you are this minute!"

They recoiled before her, for it was clear that she was in dead earnest—ready to shoot.

The chance had been missed, as they now saw. They should have taken her at once, on her appearance. She was now desperate and on guard.

"Who dares to say that I murdered my

husband?" she demanded. "I say it is false, and I demand the proof, if any can be produced. That girl is crazy; her leaving the house last night is proof of it."

"Her leaving the house was proof of her sanity and good judgment, the rather, madame."

It was Detective Dave who spoke.

She looked at him, and from him to Kid-Glove Kris, and back again.

"Who are you?" she cried. "Why are you against me? In heaven's name, is no one here my friend?"

"Yes, I am your friend, to the last," spoke up Mayor Grimes, who had just pushed his way to the front. "Somebody shall suffer for this outrage, fair warning."

"Thank heaven there is one who will believe me!"

"Do you say that you did not kill your husband, Thomas Kenton, madame," asked Detective Dave.

"Of course I say it—I swear it! Do I look like a murderess? What has led to this terrible suspicion? I demand to know what proof is against me."

"Were you Thomas Kenton's wife?"

The woman seemed ready to drop to the floor, but she mustered her nerve to face the emergency.

"My God! must insult be added to injury?" she gasped.

"This is too much, by thunder!" roared Mayor Grimes. "Young man, you had better take back those words, mighty quick!"

"And you had better not make yourself too prominent in the matter before you see my hand, sir," warned Dave. "My question has not been answered, madame!"

He was looking her in the eyes, and she had partly lowered her pistol in her dismay.

With a sudden leap he was upon her, and the weapon was out of her hand.

"A dangerous toy, madame," he suggested, quietly.

He put it in his pocket.

She made a move as if to spring at him, but she stopped and leaned against the wall.

"Well for you that you took it away from me," she uttered.

"I thought so," rejoined Dave.

There was a moment of terrible suspense then during which no one said a word.

"Answer my question when you are ready, madame," the detective coolly urged. "We have got to probe the wound to the core, now that it has been opened."

"What was your question?"

She was breathing hard, and looked like a gazelle at bay, with her peerless eyes full of alarm.

"Were you Thomas Kenton's legal wife?"

He had added a word to the question—the word "legal."

She was rendered speechless, and her face told its own story. He had struck the spot.

"You see, gentlemen, she cannot say that she was," explained the detective. "The fact is, she was not, but was the wife of another."

She was whipped into desperation.

"It is a lie, a damnable lie!" she screamed. "Who dares to say that I was not his wife?"

"I say it, and I am prepared to prove it, madame," averred Dave Coleman.

"You can't! I defy you to prove such a thing."

"What was your maiden name?"

"It was More."

"What was Burk More to you, then?"

"He was my brother. What are you coming at, anyhow, sir?"

"I am coming at the truth. Is it not remarkable that you did not recognize your brother, then, when he was brought here dead and was supposed to be David Coleman?"

She was staggered.

"And, if your name was More, how came you to wed Mr. Kenton under the name of Burke?"

She trembled violently.

"No; your maiden name was Snider," the detective went on, "and you were the wife of Burk More. And, as he died so recently, you were not the legal wife of Thomas Kenton."

She was past defending herself now.

"You married Thomas Kenton when you were already bound to another, but you did not love him. You came to love one Kid-Glove Kris, and in order to win him you murdered your husband, and you had it in your heart to murder his daughter as well, fearing that she might rob you—"

"Stop! For God's sake stop!" the woman cried out.

"What have you to say?"

"It is false, false! I did not kill my husband! It was Burk did that; I had nothing to do with it."

The crowd had recoiled from her, now, seeing that she was guilty in some measure, and all were horrified. The street was jammed with people, and a dead silence reigned.

"You admit, then, that he was your husband?"

She was silent.

"And if he killed your husband—rather, Mr. Kenton—then it was you killed him, taking his own papers from his pocket and leaving mine on his person so that he would be taken for me."

Her head was bowed lower.

Rapidly, then, the detective reviewed the matter, as he knew it, and as it has thus far been made plain to the reader, telling all about Myra Kenton's discovery and her reasons for leaving the hotel so mysteriously, and all about his own later discoveries.

The crowd hung eagerly upon his words.

Finally the woman could stand no more, and wringing her hands she implored him to stop.

"It is true! it is true!" she cried. "I can no longer defend myself, but I can at least tell the whole truth and not bear all the shame. But, keep back and give me room to speak."

As if with a new lease of strength and courage, she advanced to the top of the steps, and room was made for her.

"It is true, all true!" she repeated, "but I am guiltless of the murder of Thomas Kenton. You must hear my story and my confession, and then condemn me if you will." And she was about to begin, when a loud voice interrupted and there was a scene of confusion.

"Hold on!" the voice shouted. "I forbid it! This woman is not on trial here! She is excited and knows not what she is saying!"

And along the piazza ran Lawyer Dougherty, waving his arms frantically. "Lead her into the house, Mayor Grimes, and see that she is not further harassed. It will be time enough for all this when the case comes to trial. This is a disgrace!"

The mayor also appeared, having been absent for a few moments.

The strong-nerved detective saw through the game and moved to checkmate it promptly.

He shoved the lawyer back, and excitement reigned.

CHAPTER XLII.

TRAGIC ENDING.

Detective Dave Coleman saw a scheme on the part of the mayor to spirit the guilty woman away.

Fascinated by her, he was willing to do this, but, as said, his game was blocked. At the moment that Dave pushed the lawyer back, Kris intercepted the mayor.

The sheriff was ready to detain the

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Woman, if she attempted to leave the piazza, but she did not try it. In the moment of confusion, however, Myra Kenton fainted, and it was some moments before she came to and was able to stand.

"You need have no fear of my running away," Marie said, meantime. "I am here to stay."

"Go on with your confession," ordered the sheriff.

"My maiden name was Marie Snider," she resumed. "I married Burk More, but I soon tired of him, for he was a brute. He was lazy, besides, and we were poor, except when he happened to rob some one on the highway—for he was not averse to that business."

"He dragged me down and down. I might have been an honest woman and a good wife if I had had a husband to look up to; but I hadn't. Finally, he himself made the terrible proposal that I should come here, win and marry Mr. Kenton, and so get a hold upon his wealth. And I, eager to escape from him, agreed to the proposition."

"I did not know until too late that his plan was to murder Mr. Kenton, when he would have me re-marry him and we would together have control of the mines. I am sure that he did not know there was a daughter in the field. I never knew it myself, until she came here. I suspect that Mr. Kenton was not proud of me, and was ashamed to tell his daughter that he had married. Be that as it may, there was the fact."

"I did not love him, but I had escaped from Burk More. Then came my fate, when I met Kid-Glove Kris. I loved him at sight, and could not help the imprudence of meeting him. Mr. Kenton learned of it, and forbade it. He and Kris had a quarrel, and then Mr. Kenton was murdered. But, it was not Kid-Glove Kris who did it, nor was it I; it was Burk More. He had grown jealous of Kris, knowing even more than Mr. Kenton of my love for him. Burk was seeking his life, too."

"I knew who had killed my husband—Mr. Kenton. I knew it was Burk, and that he would also kill Kris unless I stepped between them. This I did. I appointed a place of meeting with Burk—the place where he was found dead on the trail, and there I put a bullet into his heart. Ah! that was the most satisfying act of my whole life. Then I searched him, taking away all the papers and letters he had on his person, leaving only those that belonged to David Coleman, which, as I rightly guessed, he had got by killing—or attempting to kill him somewhere on the trails."

"The rest you know. God knows I have sinned enough, but I did not kill Thomas Kenton. Maybe I might have done so; I will not say."

She stopped.

Myra, meantime, was looking to try to determine which of the two men who looked so much alike was Kris.

He no longer wore the ring, so she had no sure means of knowing him, and, during the time she had been in the faint they had changed places, so that she had lost their identity.

"Is that all you have to tell, madame?" asked the sheriff.

He took a step toward her, but she motioned him back, and they saw that she had something more to say.

"No, that is not quite all," she replied. "I want to add that I still love Kid-Glove Kris, and that I hate that girl who would rob me of his affection if she could!"

She pointed her finger at Myra.

Myra paled.

"I love the one and I hate the other," the woman asserted, almost fiercely, "and I can never die happy and leave them alive on earth. If I must die, none the less shall they live!" And she glared at them with an almost insane light in her matchless eyes.

She was not armed, but she held them all spellbound, for the moment.

"You confessed to me that you loved him," she sneered, turning toward Myra. "Ha! ha! You little thought that you were talking to one who loves him better than she loves her life. You love him—ha! ha! You may love him, but you shall never be any nearer to him than you are this instant. You love him! Ha! ha! ha! Take that!"

Like a flash she drew another pistol from under her dress, and fired.

Quick as had been her act, one of the pledged detective pards had been just a fraction of a moment quicker, in springing between her and the object of her aim, and as the pistol rang out he dropped to the ground with a moan—the bullet in his body.

Marie made no pause, but turned the deadly tube instantly upon the other of the pards, and fired again, speaking the name of Kid-Glove Kris, and a third shot was turned upon herself and she fell before them all!

A groan of horror went up from the multitude, and for some moments no one could speak or move.

Tragic had been the terrible ending.

For weeks and weeks one of the detective pards lingered between life and death.

No one knew positively which it was, whether Kid-Glove Kris or Detective Dave, but it was the one who had leaped in front of Myra Kenton and received the bullet intended for her!

The other had been killed instantly, the bullet having gone straight to his heart. Over this one, this one who had almost given his life to save hers, Myra Kenton watched day and night, devoting her every waking hour to caring for him.

To her tender care, finally, he owed his life, and it was a happy day for her when he finally regained his consciousness enough to recognize her and hear her voice, and to say a few words in response.

She was intensely eager, as was the whole camp, to know whether this man was Kris or Dave, positively.

"Thank God, she missed you!" were his first words.

"And that she did not kill you," from Myra.

She was bending over him fondly.

"Where, where is—my—my pard?" he inquired.

"Alas! she killed him. Tell me, tell me at once, which one are you? I do not know."

Tears were in the man's eyes, and he took the young woman's hand between his own, fondling and caressing it a few moments before he replied.

"Will it make any difference?" he asked.

"It can make no difference now," she answered. "It is you I love, you that I owe for my life."

"Well, I am David Coleman, the man who came here to serve you. Thank God I have been able to serve you well, though I would that Kris might have lived."

For one moment Myra turned away her face, but the next instant she clasped the man in her arms and gave him her affection without reserve. Providence had shuffled and dealt.

David Coleman remained at Hard Pan, as manager of Myra's business at first, but at no distant day they were married. And there they are to-day, and their sons and daughters are destined to grow up with the new domain, which, so short a time ago, was only a mining-camp in the far wilderness.

THE END.

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